

UPTON SINCLAIR: SOCIALIST  
PROPHET WITHOUT HONOUR.

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Upton Sinclair: Socialist prophet without honour:

A study of his changing relationship with the  
Socialist Party 1906-1934.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the last ten years literary historians and critics have begun to reevaluate the career of Upton Sinclair. It had always been prevalent to dismiss him as a pamphleteer, a muckraker and a writer of socialist doggerel. A superficial examination of his 90 year lifetime would tend to support this contention. However if it is possible to separate the writer from the politician, the socialist from the agitator, then a clearer and more accurate picture emerges. Upton Sinclair wrote over a hundred published novels, produced thousands of magazine articles, broadsheets, letters and a multitude of correspondence. He redefined the proletarian novel and accurately captured within his work the sense of the radical experience in the United States during the twentieth century.

This thesis attempts to analyze Sinclair's position within this radical experience. It is not concerned with his literary contribution but more with his role as a socialist and the way in which the attitude of American socialist movement changed towards him. In the period 1900-1934 this attitude changed dramatically. The effect of this change was to leave Sinclair in its wake. He suffered from the unfortunate handicap of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. In the earlier stages of his career he was stigmatized as a radical and considered dangerous by the more conservative elements of society. By the time the mainstream of literary and political thought had shifted leftwards Sinclair was considered too conservative.

With the publication of his most famous novel, The Jungle (1906) Sinclair became the novelist of the American

scene and the recorder of the great industrial movements. This was to be the role he would play for the rest of his career. The other motivating force in his life was his role as a socialist. As Granville Hicks has observed Sinclair was not deflected by any divisions of interests; what interested him as a socialist interested him as a novelist. His own brand of socialism is his most constant theme in his writing.

Sinclair was converted to socialism at the turn of the century. Writing some years later he noted:

It was like the falling down of prison walls about my mind; the most amazing discovery after all these years - that I did not have to carry the whole burden of humanities' failure upon my two frail shoulders.

Sinclair remained true to his socialist beliefs. However the changing face of both the socialist and radical scene in the United States effectively cut him out of any participation in the twenties and thirties. This thesis traces those changes and tries to offer some reasons for them.

When trying to understand the direction of Sinclair's career it is necessary to pinpoint his motivation. Although socialism was definitely important his strongest motivation was as a 'fearless enemy of corruption and injustice'. Cartoonist Ralph Steadman writing in 1984 comes perhaps closest to defining this type of reasoning when describing his own experiences during the sixties:

When the 1960s got underway I felt pretty hopeful and even dared to imagine that each new drawing was a nail in the coffin of old values or rather old patterns of behaviour which were full of privilege and injustice. It is a strong feeling when you're young. You really believe things will change. So I worked with conviction. It genuinely felt like a cause. There was good and there was bad in the world and I was with the good. Knocking things down was meaningful fun.

The legacy of Sinclair's career is not only his contri-

bution as a writer, and socialist, but as a man who not only recorded the events of his time but took part in them.

Sinclair has left a collection of personal papers and correspondence in the Lilly Library which is estimated to weigh over eight tonnes. Historians have only scratched the surface of this material but already a vast amount of valuable information has been unearthed. Throughout his lifetime Sinclair communicated and corresponded with some of the influential and outstanding men and women of his age. In the Lilly Library collection there are letters from Joseph Stalin, Gandi, Albert Einstein, Charlie Chaplin, Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt, Lenin, H.G. Wells, George Bernard Shaw, Jack London, Woodrow Wilson, Eugene V. Debs, Joseph Fox, Henry Ford, and Emma Goldman. These offer valuable insight and information. They are the tangible proof of Sinclair's influence and importance in the changing face of American history.

## CHAPTER I

### DIME NOVELS AND SOCIAL PASSIONS

He was one of those hypercompassionate men who cannot sleep at night when they think of ten year old children working in mills and who convinced that society is ruled by organized greed, feel that the burden of changing it rests upon them ... and he always felt that by starting a magazine, writing a novel or winning a strike he might change the world into what it ought to be.

Van Wyck Brooks,  
The Confident Years 1885-1915

The direction of Sinclair's writing career and the path which his personal life took him were conditioned by events in his childhood. His father was a liquor salesman who over-indulged in his own products and because of this Sinclair followed his mother's lead. She was both a prohibitionist and a non-smoker, two strong convictions to which he also adhered throughout his life. In 1927 Sinclair wrote The Wet Parade, a prohibitionist novel later made into a film starring Robert Young, Walter Huston and Jimmie Durante. Thirty years later Sinclair again took up the theme in The Cup of Fury. It recorded his attempts to illuminate the literary and personal fall of several prominent writers who had suffered because of 'John Barleycorn'.

The second major influence in his childhood was his southern background. He came from an aristocratic family<sup>1</sup> which suffered financial failure. His father had taken the family north in the hope of bringing some financial stability into its life. Unfortunately the attempt failed. Because of

his father's failing health the Sinclairs were forced to live in greatly diminished circumstances and never regained the standard of living they had once experienced. After Sinclair's first marriage broke up, he married again; choosing ironically an aristocratic southerner from a background similar to his own.

Due to the disruption in his early life, Sinclair did not begin school until he was ten. He soon proved to be a natural and enthusiastic scholar, and by the age of twelve had completed all eight grades. Although academically he was eligible to go on to high school he was still too young and was therefore required to remain at his first school for a third year. While developing an appetite for knowledge he also discovered a need for spiritual fulfilment. This fulfilment was provided by the Reverend William Wilmering Moir who became a kind of stepfather. Under his wing Sinclair became a member of the Episcopalian Church. By the age of fourteen he was able to describe himself as a devout Christian. Although he experienced some doubts after reading the Oxford Bampton Lectures in defence of Christianity, he remained throughout his life a committed Christian Socialist. Much of his writing reflects his advocacy of Christian as well as humanitarian ideals.<sup>2</sup>

After having spent a third year in elementary school he finally entered high school. While there he became friendly with one of his classmates, Simon Stern. Stern had greatly impressed him by actually selling a short story to a weekly magazine. Inspired by Stern's example, Sinclair sent to Argosy magazine a selection of short stories he had been

working on since grade school. To his delighted surprise one story was accepted for publication and he received the princely sum of twenty-five dollars.

Although the Argosy story has disappeared into obscurity, its importance lies in the fact that it represents Sinclair's introduction to the literary world. The next few years, however, saw his dreams of literary fame and fortune seriously dented. His initial success with Argosy was short-lived. Throughout his years at high school Sinclair continued to write prolifically although he failed to interest magazines in his work. His sole source of income came from jokes and one-liners which he sold to a number of periodicals for a dollar a piece.

During this period in his life he underwent a number of changes which would influence his career. He records in his autobiography that he felt himself becoming an idealist. He wrote:

I too was a prince, in conflict with a sordid and malignant world at least so I saw myself and lived entirely in that fantasy, very snobbish, scornful and superior.<sup>3</sup>

This feeling of disgust with the external world was coupled with internal conflicts. Sinclair was experiencing sexual cravings and temptations which were in conflict with the vows of chastity he had made when first entering the Episcopalian Church. For many years Sinclair fought a battle to find a mean between indulgence and repression.

When Sinclair finally graduated from high school he was still no closer to realising his dreams of being a financially independent writer. His only published material

continued to be his one-liners which, though a useful source of income, proved to be artistically unsatisfactory - if not embarrassing. After graduating, Sinclair spent a summer writing and drifting amongst the Thousand Islands in the upper St Lawrence River. During this time he decided to enter Columbia University.

Lacking any prospect of financial support from his family, he went to Henry Harrison Lewis, editor of Army and Navy Weekly, one of the numerous nickel publications that proliferated around the turn of the century. Under the pseudonym of Lieutenant Frederick Garrison, U.S.N., he wrote the highly popular Mark Mallory stories. For each of these West Point sagas Sinclair received forty dollars. He was finally launched on a literary career which was both prolific and profitable.

In alternate weeks, when not writing his Mallory stories, Sinclair became Ensign Clarke Fitch, U.S.N., and turned out over 30,000 words a week about the naval adventures of Cliff Faraday. When America entered the Spanish War in 1898, the editors felt that Mark Mallory and Cliff Faraday should not be sitting around Westpoint and Annapolis whilst their countrymen were bleeding, so Sinclair read a book about Cuba and shifted his stories to the battle-fields there.

He was in a very good position to capitalize on the war-story boom. He began writing for a newly-founded monthly magazine called The Columbia Library. Each issue was written wholly by Sinclair and ran to about 50,000 words. To complete each issue he found himself working seven days a week, writing about 8,000 words a day.

While honouring these commitments, Sinclair had entered Columbia University as an undergraduate. He continued the voluminous reading he had begun as a small child. During his Columbian days, he records that he read all the English Classics and by learning Latin, German, French and Italian, had soon read many great works in these languages as well.

The idealistic streak which had emerged during his last year at high school, became even more visible at Columbia. He became an active supporter of the anti-prostitution and prohibitionist crusader William Travers Jerome, and helped to raise money to aid his election to the Municipal Government, volunteering to campaign on his behalf. Unfortunately, the experience left Sinclair bitter and confused, because Jerome failed to implement his policy and did very little while in office.

A few months later, in 1900, Sinclair completed his first novel Springtime and Harvest. It was the culmination of many ideas he had been working on since his summer spent on the St Lawrence River. He had difficulty in getting any of the major publishing houses interested. Finally he found a small printer who agreed to print a thousand copies. The final product was 'a cheap and unattractive looking little read volume as my ascetic notion required'.<sup>4</sup> The novel was reviewed unenthusiastically by The Times and The American although Edward J. Wheeler, editor of The Literary Digest, was impressed. On his recommendation Funk and Wagnall offered to reprint the novel and publicize it more widely.

During his summer holidays he again returned to the



St Lawrence River. This pilgrimage, back to nature to seek inspiration and to write, was one he would make throughout his career. He wrote many of his best works in a succession of isolated log cabins and tents pitched in various wilderness areas.

While on the river, he completed another novel, Prince Hagen (1901). He sent the opening chapter to Bliss Perry, editor of The Atlantic Monthly, whose original zeal waned because he came to consider it too bitter. 'The truth was that the story was not good enough; the writer was strong on emotions but weak on facts'.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, Funk and Wagnall had released Springtime and Harvest retitled King Midas. Although it was well received by the critics, sales were only moderate.

Sinclair now threw himself into his writing. He returned to an island in the St Lawrence and completed a draft of a new novel, The Journal of Arthur Stirling. It was artistically superior to his previous novels and remains perhaps the most poetic of his works and the nearest Sinclair came to true 'literature' status.

The Journal of Arthur Stirling in retrospect, appears very autobiographical. It chronicles the failures and frustrations of a struggling poet and writer. The novel gained a certain notoriety when The New York Times reported the alleged suicide of Arthur Stirling. The hoax had the effect of grabbing the attention of publishers Appleton and Co. who were eventually persuaded to publish the novel. When the novel appeared in February 1903 it created a tremendous furore. For most readers Arthur Stirling was a real person and the episodes of the novel were true. Despite the public-

ity surrounding the novel it suffered the fate of many of Sinclair's earlier works, in that although it was critically well received it did not sell well.

He therefore drifted into a period of depression in which the physical effects of hunger and the mental anxiety of rejection and failure combined to create a feeling of bitterness. This in turn put increasing pressure on his marriage. A few months before the release of Springtime and Harvest, he had married Meta Fuller. The marriage produced one child and was always a tense and painful relationship. The financial insecurity of their position and Sinclair's own personal struggles created insurmountable problems. The following winter he vented his frustrations in the 'ferocious' A Captain of Industry. It was an expression of the bitterness he felt and so successfully did it attack American society of the day, that by 1932 it had become a popular item on the list of the State publishing house of Soviet Russia.

Sinclair decided that his next project would be a trilogy. Taking his wife and the meagre savings he had left from the sale of his novels he moved to Princeton, New Jersey. This trilogy was to be a historical work on the Civil War. The Princeton University Library contained the second largest Civil War collection in America. While researching for this work he finished another novel, Prince Hagen. It was closer in theme and content to The Journal of Arthur Stirling than to A Captain of Industry.

Sinclair spent many fruitless hours hawking his manuscript to various publishing houses and magazines. Having

been declined by no fewer than seventeen magazines and twenty two publishers, it was finally bought by a Boston firm. Though his aspirations of great financial returns were not realised, the \$200 he did receive in royalties enabled him to build a wooden cabin. It was to this wilderness retreat that he eventually went to write the first novel of the trilogy, Manassas. On completion he received a \$500 advance. The novel which emerged, rather than being a purely historical study, appeared somewhat radical. Some years later, when Floyd Dell was contemplating writing a biography of Sinclair, he queried his creation of a protagonist who was a social rebel in a conventional southern family. Sinclair replied 'I thought the problem over and reported my psychology as that of a 'poor relation'. It had been my fate from the earliest childhood to live in the presence of wealth which belonged to others'.<sup>6</sup>

Obviously, not only did the characterization have its roots deep in Sinclair's childhood, but it was distinctively radical as well. In 1971 William J. Kimball wrote an article for the McNeese Review called 'Manassas, An Early Expression of Upton Sinclair's socialist leanings'. In this article he pointed to Manassas as containing several clues to the direction in which Sinclair's later career would follow.

The protagonist, Alan Montague, while being a social rebel in the context of the novel is also a very different character in the context of the literature of the time. He is the personification of Sinclair's own personal rebellion. Part of the revolution was a result of his disenchantment with the Protestant Episcopalian Church. This feeling was

due mainly to his belief in the redundancy of religion in dealing with the world's evils. Between the ages of 17 and 20 he became obsessed with the corruption of the capitalist system.

His writings of this period seem to indicate that he laboured under the misconception that he was the only one who could identify this malignity. Sinclair's naïvete meant that he invested more faith in the 'well mannered gentlemen who had been to college and acquired noble ideas'<sup>7</sup> than he did in Bryanism and Populism to remedy the evils of capitalism. Writing in 1932, he admitted that he had despised these modern movements:

While emotionally in revolt against mammon worship,  
I was intellectually a perfect little snob and  
tory<sup>8</sup>.

He also remembered how quick he had been to believe the propaganda surrounding the Haymarket Affair. He noted: 'In short I believed in 1889 what 95 per cent of America believed in 1932'.<sup>9</sup>

Sinclair's self-righteous, almost arrogant, attitude was gradually being eroded. In 1902 he had met Leonard D. Abbott, a committed socialist who had given him some socialist pamphlets and a copy of Wiltshire's Magazine. From a reading of this material he had a revelation that others shared the same beliefs he had been holding for a number of years. He devoted several paragraphs of his autobiography to an attempt at describing what an uplifting and awakening experience his new found 'religion' proved to be'.

Sinclair began to devour all the socialist literature he could find. His education was furthered by an introduction to John Spargo, editor of the Socialist Monthly. Through

Spargo he met another socialist, George D. Herron. He confessed in later years that he owed his survival as a writer to Herron. He supported Sinclair financially, encouraged and praised his writing at a time when he was at a personal and artistic low ebb. It was due mainly to Herron that through Manassas he was able to achieve a small measure of financial security.

During these years Sinclair made contact with several prominent socialists. Their influence greatly shaped his attitudes to both socialism and his writing. One such influence was Gaylord Wiltshire. Wiltshire had made a fortune in billboard advertising in Los Angeles and then converted to socialism. He used his vast fortune to establish a weekly magazine in California. He eventually brought it to New York and turned it into a monthly publication. One of the earliest regular contributors was Upton Sinclair.

The experience of writing for Wiltshires and his adoption of socialism convinced Sinclair that it was time to embark on a crusade to expose 'the evils of capitalism'. In September 1904 he became interested in the Chicago stockyard workers' strike. His interest in their working conditions led a year later to the writing of his most famous work, The Jungle. On 17 September he wrote a broadside to the defeated strikers in Chicago, urging them not to give up their struggle for improved conditions. In terms of literary contribution the broadside has little to commend it, but more importantly it represents a monumental document in Sinclair's career because it heralds the beginning of a long and dedicated career of advocating and fighting for the rights of

working class people throughout America.

A few months later he wrote a second broadside to the farming community, Farmers of America Unite. While living near Princeton he had learned something about small farming communities in the United States. He was angered by the lack of technological progress and the mentality of many farmers who repeatedly followed what their fathers had done and voted for the political parties they had supported. He remarked in later years:

I often thought of writing a book about them but you would not have believed it because the facts fitted so perfectly into my socialist thesis you would have been sure I was making them to order.<sup>10</sup>

It would be in the stockyards of Chicago that he would find the perfect situation to fit his socialist thesis. Before this time however he had two more articles published in Collier's Magazine. One was a reply to Gertrude Atherton's speculation concerning the bourgeois nature of American literature and the second explaining his socialism. At the same time he published an open letter to the leading muck-raker of the period, Lincoln Steffens, author of the highly-influential Shame of Cities series. The open letter format was one which he employed on several occasions.

The nature and themes of his writing had become increasingly more radical. This fact was not lost on 'Old Peter Collier' the owner of Collier's Magazine who informed Sinclair that his articles would no longer be permitted to appear in his magazine. This was probably the first example of the censorship and often total rejection to which Sinclair's work would later be subjected. He later chronicled his running battle with the press in his famous pamphlet The Brass

Check. He had reached a position from which he could never back down. He had become a socialist, a muckraker and in the eyes of many a dangerous radical.

Having written a number of socialist articles Sinclair came to the conclusion that the only way successfully to spread socialist ideas was to organize. By 1905 he was already a member of the Socialist Party and in 1906 he was the Party candidate for President. It was the first of many unsuccessful campaigns to gain office. He ran for President, Congress and in 1934 campaigned on the Democratic ticket for Governor of California. More than ten such attempts were unsuccessful although the 1934 campaign would prove to be one of the most hotly contested and controversial in American history.

The first concrete step he took towards the organization was the launching of the Intercollegiate Socialist Society. He had reflected on his own ignorance of socialist and other modern revolutionary movements while attending college. Most professors were reluctant to teach these subjects and Sinclair therefore reasoned that students must educate themselves. On 12 September 1905 Sinclair and several prominent socialists met at Pecks' Restaurant on Fulton Street in New York. They formed the Intercollegiate Socialist Society electing Jack London as President. Branches sprang up all over campuses throughout the United States, vigorous debating and disseminating socialist doctrines. In the 1920s the society was renamed the League of Industrial Democracy and continued to flourish for several years.

While Sinclair was organizing the I.S.S. Manassas was

published. Although it received critical acclaim, it sold fewer than 2,000 copies. In four and a half years he had written a total of six novels and novelettes, published four of them, but the sum of receipts was less than \$1,000.



## DIME NOVELS AND SOCIAL PASSIONS

- 1 See Appendix 1. The family tree of the Sinclair family shows their relationship with The Duke of Windsor.
- 2 Although Sinclair displayed Christian attitudes in much of his writing he did little to disguise his extreme hostility to the Roman Catholic Church. In both The Goslings (1924) and They Call me Carpenter (1922) he was highly critical of this church. In They Call me Carpenter, Mr Carpenter (Jesus Christ) visits a Western city (Los Angeles) in the twenties. During the course of his stay he expresses contempt for the comfortable churches of the city denouncing by name the Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist, Episcopalian, Baptist, and Unitarian Churches. Sinclair saw all these churches as being debauched by capitalism.
- 3 Sinclair, Candid Reminiscences, The first 30 Years. Werner Laurie, London, 1932, p.61.
- 4 IBID, p.101.
- 5 IBID, p.106.
- 6 IBID, p.126.
- 7 IBID, p.127.
- 8 IBID, p.128.
- 9 IBID, p.129.
- 10 IBID, p.133.

## CHAPTER II

## THE LAST OF THE MUCKRAKE MEN

'To the most beautiful joys of my life belongs to  
your wicked tongue'

Albert Einstein in a letter to  
Upton Sinclair.

Whom does the dirtiest pot not attack?  
Who hits the world on the hollow tooth?  
Who spurns the now and swears by the morrow?  
Who takes no care about being undignified?  
The Sinclair is a valiant man  
If anyone then I can attest it  
in heartiness

Albert Einstein.

A verse written by Albert Einstein and  
sent with an autographed picture to  
Upton Sinclair.

In 1978 Dennis Welland published an article to commemorate the centenary of Upton Sinclair's birth. Welland joins a growing number of American scholars who are re-evaluating Sinclair's work. He lamented the fact that Sinclair had been dismissed or patronized by most critics as 'prematurely dated and insufficiently imaginative'.<sup>1</sup> As a consequence, studies of Sinclair have tended to focus on his life, rather than his writings. One scholar, who had more admiration than most, even summed him up as 'a minor writer and a major man'.<sup>2</sup>

In most previous surveys of American literature, editors had been content to describe him in such terms as 'a muck-raking novelist in the realistic tradition':<sup>3</sup> a description usually followed by a perfunctory reference to The Jungle as his most famous work. Though modern anthologies have begun

to agree with Welland's contention that Sinclair's work has a far greater literary and historical significance than had previously been suggested, the majority continued to follow the line that The Jungle marked the 'climax of a period of profound social disquietude in the United States where amidst an immediate response of startled horror Sinclair found himself stigmatized as a professional muckraker'.<sup>4</sup>

The continued labelling of his later works King Coal (1914), The Brass Check (1919) and Boston (1928) did not shake his determination to expose the evils and injustices of American society. This commitment continued throughout his long and prolific career and provoked J.D. Koerner to describe Sinclair as 'The Last of the Muckrake Men'.<sup>5</sup>

The term 'muckraker' was first coined by Theodore Roosevelt when he applied it to those engaged in uncovering corruption in American society:

In Bunyan's Pilgrims' Progress you may recall the description of the man with the muckrake, the man who could look no way but downward with the muckrake in his hands who was offered the celestial crown for his muckrake but would neither look up or regard the crown he was offered but continued to rake off the floor.<sup>6</sup>

The era of protest and public disclosure had its roots in the literature of the previous two decades. The work of social scientists and philosophers<sup>7</sup> had influenced late nineteenth century. The single tax theories of Henry George and the Utopian novels of Henry Bellamy had gained many advocates and followers throughout the United States and around the world. The work of these writers uncovered many problems afflicting society and offered a number of possible solutions. They also indirectly initiated a multitude of investigations

and exposés which began appearing regularly in magazines.

However, historians<sup>8</sup> do not usually date the advent of the 'muckraking era' until the appearance of Lincoln Steffens's article 'Tweed Days in St Louis' in the October 1902 issue of McClures Magazine. Steffens went on to become the greatest of all muckrakers with his series Shame of the Cities being one of the most notable works of this genre. The publication of 'Tweed Days in St Louis' is a key event because it was the first time this type of writing had successfully captivated the nation. The article initiated a flood of similar stories and reports.

The continued popularity of such works arose mainly from a public mentality which demanded newer and more horrifying exposés of the trusts and monopolies that controlled many of their lives. The success of the magazine articles induced writers and novelists to fictionalize the operations of these corporations. Soon, for every volume of muckraking journalism, there appeared a companion volume of fiction which proved to be as popular and as eagerly awaited as the journalistic exposés had once been. The gradual displacement of non-fictional style was best illustrated in the case of Sinclair's The Jungle. His novel proved to be far more effective in implementing changes and reforms than the disclosures in Charles Edward Russell's attack on the Beef Trust in 'The Greatest Trust in the World'. Although Russell and his article are generally forgotten, Sinclair and The Jungle are considered largely responsible for bringing about the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906, culminating sixty two years later with his invitation by President Lyndon B. Johnson to the White House

to witness the signing of the Wholesome Meat Bill.

Although Upton Sinclair is generally regarded as a muck-raking novelist by literary historians and critics, it is necessary to try and place him within the broader literary categories of his time. There remains a continuing debate as to Sinclair's place in either the schools of Naturalism, Realism or Romanticism. His works contain elements of all three, although Romanticism may be dominant. According to Charles Child Walcutt:

He is realistic in that his characters are free but he is naturalistic in that their motives are wonderfully simplified ... thus the characters are transformed into two dimensional forces: instead of being prey of such naturalistic forces they become them. It is concerned with forces like naturalistic novels but it is intensely moral and primarily eager to assign moral responsibility for the troubles of society.<sup>9</sup>

The Jungle also belonged to a very different historic and literary development. By his choice of Chicago as a setting for the novel he indirectly joined a rapidly growing interest in that city's life and institutions. By the turn of the century, Chicago had become the second largest city in the United States and was attracting a host of writers and journalists. The first discussion of Chicago began with Henry Blake Fuller's The Cliff Dwellers in 1893. Fuller observed the city and its inhabitants over a period of change both in the composition of the population and in the physical size of the city. He condemned Chicago as 'a villain that corrupted men'.<sup>10</sup> Five years later, Robert Herrick took up the idea and extended it in The Gospel of Freedom (1898). In this novel, the heroine discovers that civic reform is the only way of improving cities. By 1904 in The Common Lot Herrick

had changed his original thesis and was sounding a new note; that the city encouraged man to express his innate corruption, a corruption that could not be eradicated by civic reform. Sinclair, while not directly drawing upon these sources did elaborate on the solutions that Herrick had avoided. His answers, alternatives to civic reform, were expounded in the final pages of The Jungle.

The Jungle was not originally intended to be a novel. It began as a series of articles commissioned by the radical newspaper Appeal to Reason. This commission came at a time when Sinclair's life and career were at a crossroads. By 1904, he had received only meagre returns for four years of untiring artistic effort. This served to harden his resolve not only to write 'The Great American Novel' but to produce a novel which would be financially successful. Throughout his early years he was constantly worried about lack of money. In 1909 this anxiety prompted him to take the unusual step of offering his talents for sale. In a letter to the socialist publisher, Gaylord Wiltshire, he offered himself, all his works and their ensuing profits for a living allowance for himself, his wife from whom he was separated, and their son.<sup>11</sup> Although Wiltshire did not take this offer seriously, The Jungle, Sinclair's seventh and most successful novel, did at long last bring him financial security and international fame.

The opportunity to write The Jungle had come indirectly through a suggestion from Fred D. Warren, editor of Appeal to Reason. Warren had been greatly impressed by Sinclair's expose of chattel slavery in Manassas and thought a similar study of wage slavery equally as effective. The original assignment

called for a series of articles which would be published weekly. Sinclair chose Chicago's meatpacking district as the setting for his articles. The decision was partly determined by an interest in the living conditions of the predominantly immigrant workforce and by his involvement in the unsuccessful strike in 1904. He saw in Warren's offer a chance not only to do something positive to help the plight of the Chicago workers but to publicize the predicament of all wage slaves throughout the United States.

The Chicago stockyards, established in 1865, soon became an enormous railroad centre for the sale and transfer of livestock. As the stockyards expanded, so townships grew up nearby as men and women were attracted by the jobs available. By the mid-seventies Philip Armour and Gustavus Swift, the biggest meat processors in America, had arrived to take advantage of the unique positional and labour opportunities which the Chicago site offered. Their arrival was closely accompanied by the introduction of natural refrigeration and other technical advances which further generated jobs and growth. The packers' agents recruited a workforce from towns and villages throughout Northern and Western Europe, offering unheard of wages and incentives. The yards continued to flourish and in the year of World's Exposition, (1893), the packinghouses and associated industries employed over 23,000 workers and the yards received an estimated 1,500,000 visitors. By that time the meat packing enterprise was being heralded as the 'eighth wonder of the world'.<sup>12</sup>

In 1904, when Sinclair arrived in Chicago to begin his assignment, he found a very different picture from that paint-

ed by earlier observers. The original German and Irish workers had either moved upward in the packinghouse hierarchy or into higher paid industries elsewhere. The jobs left vacant by their departure had been filled by immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe. These new immigrants were less well adapted to city life and the hardships of industrialized America than their predecessors had been. The opportunities for advancement and prosperity which were once a part of stockyard life were at an end.<sup>12</sup> They were replaced by political corruption, oppression and human hardship. The stockyards that Sinclair observed in 1904, were still an 'industrial marvel' but had become 'a slaughterhouse where the many were ground up into sausages for the breakfast of a few'.<sup>13</sup>

Sinclair spent seven weeks in the packinghouse district. In that time he lived and dressed as a labourer. By the simple device of carrying a dinner pail he was able to move effortlessly through the factories, shops, saloons and any place where workers gathered to socialize. He absorbed the stories of scandals and corruption that were an everyday part of the newly arrived immigrant experience. Although Sinclair's original assignment called for a series of articles he found so many industrial abuses, so much suffering and such a wide range of interesting and memorable characters that he decided to turn them into a novel. Out of his observations there, and also out of the emotions born of his own bitter struggle with poverty, came The Jungle. The autobiographical nature of much of his writing is highlighted in his American Outpost (1932) when he confessed that The Jungle "externally ... had to do



with a family of stockyard workers but internally it was the story of my own family'.<sup>14</sup>

After seven weeks in Chicago Sinclair retreated to a shack near Princeton to write his novel. He wrote vividly of his experiences among the wage slaves of the Beef Trust. In his autobiography he would later write:

Whenever I was in doubt about the significance of my facts ... I would fortify myself by Smiths<sup>15</sup> expert professional horror. "These are not packing plants", he declared, "these are packing boxes crammed with wage slaves."<sup>16</sup>

The horror remained deeply etched in his memory. He was to later claim that it was two months before he started writing The Jungle after his departure from Chicago, 'the story stayed and I wrote down whole paragraphs, whole pages exactly as I had memorized them.'<sup>17</sup> He maintained:

People used to ask me afterwards if I had not spent my life in Chicago and I answered if I had done so I could never have written The Jungle. I would have taken for granted things which now hit as a sudden violent blow. I went about, white faced and thin, partly from undernourishment, partly from horror. It seemed to me I was confronted by a veritable fortress of oppression. How to breach those walls or to scale them it was a military problem.<sup>18</sup>

The novel which emerged from his experiences was loosely based upon a Lithuanian family whom he had observed at a traditional wedding ceremony in Packingtown. Jurgis Rudkus the protagonist and his family were newly arrived immigrants in Chicago. During the course of the novel Sinclair subjects the hapless Jurgis to every calamity that ever befell an immigrant labourer. By the end of the novel, Jurgis has lost his job, his health, his family and finally his dignity at the hands of corrupt packers and their officials. After a period of disillusionment and suffering he is dramatically converted

to socialism and seemingly finds the answers to his problems. This ultimate answer is attacked by critics who view the last sixty pages as unnecessary and included solely as propaganda.

Some critics have also focussed on the Lithuanian aspects of the novel. Both Alfonsas Sesplaukis and Antanas Musleikis point out that Sinclair's characters are out of step with their Lithuanian backgrounds, customs, mentality and the proper motivation of ties and loyalty. Musleikis asserts that Sinclair used the Lithuanian characters as an 'exposition of capitalist evils rather than a psychological study of human nature.' This subjugation of the psychological entity of the human being is a criticism labelled at many of Sinclair's later works because it reduces human nature 'to a bunch of conditioned responses'. Without a study of human nature many critics believe The Jungle loses its status as a work of imagination and becomes something else: a record of actual events. George Bernard Shaw admired Sinclair's achievement. 'When people ask me what has happened in my long lifetime', he wrote to Sinclair, 'I do not refer them to the newspaper files and to the authorities, but to your novels.'<sup>19</sup>

To Shaw the documentary style was a sign of literary skill. Granville Hicks agrees that Sinclair's work suggests that he is primarily a pamphleteer but his novels deserve to be examined as works of literature. Hicks applauded his fact gathering abilities but asserted that he was guilty of a feature to 'assimilate the material he so wisely accumulates'.<sup>20</sup> This lack of assimilation 'confronts the reader with a bewildering mass of unintegrated data'.<sup>21</sup> One writer in a study of Chicago claims the novels of Sinclair and his Chicago contem-

poraries Herrick and Fuller were 'like rooms crammed with furniture',<sup>22</sup> and in particular The Jungle 'slopped over on all sides'.<sup>23</sup> It is certainly true that Sinclair included practically every scandal he had heard while in Chicago. He liberally sprinkled his text with 'a plug' for everything from vegetarianism to prohibition and, not surprisingly included the increase in the Socialist vote between 1900 and 1904.

When Sinclair had completed the draft of the first chapters of The Jungle he sent them to George P. Brett of the Macmillan Publishing Company. Brett's initial reaction was favourable to the early chapters, but he disagreed with the final chapters in which he believed Sinclair had 'run wild in the end attempting to solve all the problems of America'.<sup>24</sup> Brett also recommended that Sinclair should revise the more gratuitous 'blood and guts' descriptions of the killing process and conditions in the packinghouses. Sinclair's response was typical and predictable, 'I had to tell the truth and let people make of it what they could'.<sup>25</sup> This determination coupled with his inability to return to Chicago because of writing commitments elsewhere meant that alterations he could, and in some cases, did make were not enough to satisfy Brett. On Brett's advice Macmillan eventually rejected the manuscript. This action led five other publishing houses to reject it as well.

Sinclair despairing of ever seeing the novel published, decided to publish it himself. His close friend and fellow socialist, Jack London, wrote a rousing manifesto calling on the socialist movement to rally to a novel he called 'the

Uncle Tom's Cabin of wage slavery. It is alive and warm. It is brutal with life. It is written of sweat and tears'.<sup>26</sup> Although Sinclair could boast such famous friends as Shaw and London their influence was unable to secure a publisher for him at this time. London's manifesto was however successful in spreading the fame of The Jungle and paved the way for the publication of Sinclair's Sustainers Edition. Sinclair charged \$1.20 (postage paid) and sent copies to various subscribers. Within two months he had raised \$4,000 towards the cost of a full-scale printing.

While the first printing of The Jungle was being set up, Sinclair was persuaded to see Walter H. Page, of Doubleday Page and Co. Page's reaction was similar to that of his colleagues. Although impressed with the novel, he did not want to place his company in a legally vulnerable position and was anxious about many passages which he considered libellous. Nevertheless Sinclair and Page eventually struck a bargain: Page agreed to submit the proofs to James Keeley, managing director of The Chicago Tribune, who was to arrange for a disinterested and competent reporter to prepare a report on the validity of Sinclair's allegations. The 30-page report was a virtual confirmation of Page's doubts and the fears other publishers had voiced.

The 'Keeley Report' contended that the material was offensive in many parts and likely to be considered libellous by the packers. But Sinclair convinced Page after long negotiations to conduct a personal investigation. This independent inquiry was assigned to a young lawyer who visited Chicago in late December, 1905. While wandering through the packing-

house district, he met a publicity agent for the packers. From the ensuing conversation, the lawyer learned that the agent had a surprisingly intimate knowledge of The Jungle. The lawyer soon established that the agent had not only read the proofs but had prepared the report for Keeley. Double-day put The Jungle into a print, a few days later.

In February 1906 The Jungle appeared and attracted immediate public acclaim; it also provoked bitter hostility. The Times Literary Supplement review stated: 'Seldom we believe if ever has a hideous state of things been exposed so fearlessly and thoroughly'.<sup>27</sup> The review went on to observe that The Jungle 'engenders both approval and repulsion'. For example,

'The very first thing to be said about it is that if it is a novel, a work of imagination the conduct of an author who invented and published in a form easily accessible to all readers young and old, male and female such disgusting inflammatory matter as this would deserve the severest censure. Unhappily we have good reason believing it all to be fact not fiction'.<sup>28</sup>

Contemporary critical response was generally favourable and followed the line of the Times review. The New York Evening World stated: 'Not since Byron awoke one morning to find himself famous has there been such an example of worldwide celebrity won in a day by a book as has come to Upton Sinclair'.<sup>29</sup> Arthur Brisbane, in The New York Evening Journal, declared: 'It is a book that does for modern slavery what Uncle Tom's Cabin did for black slavery. But the work is done far better and more accurately in The Jungle than in Uncle Tom's Cabin'.<sup>30</sup> Eugene V. Debs was perhaps the most enthusiastic of reviewers when he declared, 'In this fearful story the horrors of industrial slavery are so vividly drawn as if

by lightning it marks an epoch in revolutionary literature'.<sup>31</sup>

Later critics, without the socialistic leanings of Debs and with the hindsight not available to Brisbane tended to see The Jungle as an event in nature rather than an event in literature. For example Robert Herrick wrote in The New Republic in 1931:

'Sophisticated readers, professors, and critics hold that Mr Sinclair's novels are not literature - whatever that may mean ... If a passionate interest is the substance of all great literature - life, if a wide acquaintance with its special manifestations of the writers own day, if a deep conviction about the values underlying its varied phenomena and the ability to set forth, count in the making of enduring literature, all these Mr Sinclair has demonstrated again and again that he possesses'<sup>32</sup>

In 1940, Granville Hicks in The New Republic bemoaned the attitude of literary historians. He concluded, 'because his faults are always so conspicuous and never the fashionable ones Mr Sinclair has been either dismissed or patronized by the majority of critics and literary historians'.<sup>33</sup>

Howard Mumford Jones writing six years later commended the courage of Sinclair's efforts to change American conditions through novels like The Jungle. However like many others he qualified his statements by adding:

'Above all his courage is ... the courage of American individualism which has nothing to do with socialism of Mr Sinclair's dream. But when Mr Sinclair explicitly or implicitly demands that one's sympathy for his courage be translated into one's admiration for him as a literary artist, one can only deny the confusing plea'.<sup>34</sup>

The second group to respond to the publication of The Jungle were the owners. Their reaction appeared in a series of articles written by J. Ogden Armour that were published in the Saturday Evening Post. These articles were a denial of the charges of The Jungle and a restatement of the packers'

assertions that they were instituting industrial reforms. Sinclair decided to counter the packers with an article of his own which would prove conclusively the claims of The Jungle. The Condemned Meat Industry focussed on the adulterated meat and other abuses described in the novel. Though his descriptions of the meat processes only constituted twelve pages in the entire novel, it was this section which most outraged the public.

This disappointed Sinclair, because his aim had been to shock the public by his description of the conditions the workers were forced to endure. He was later to lament, 'that though I aimed at the heart I hit them in the stomach'.<sup>35</sup> These twelve pages contain a collection of nauseatingly vivid descriptions of what passed for beef and pork and the unhygienic and dangerous processes by which diseased animals were transformed into a wide variety of meal products. The allegation that caused the most public outcry was, the story of the men in the cooking rooms:

'... and as for the other men who worked in the tank rooms full of steam and in some of which there were open vats near the level of the floor, their particular trouble was that they were fished out, there was never enough of them left to be worth exhibiting - sometimes they would be overlooked for days till all but the bones of them had gone out into the world as Durhams Pure Leaf Lard'.<sup>36</sup>

From this information and other sources Sinclair compiled an 8,000 word article which was eventually accepted by E.J. Ridgeway of Everybody's Magazine. Ridgeway's only stipulation was that Sinclair prove his allegations. Sinclair went over his finished article line by line carefully justifying each of his claims to Ridgeway. The bulk of the article was based upon the testimony of an Irishman who had worked as a

foreman on the Armour killingbeds. He had told Sinclair under oath of how condemned carcasses were sold to the city. Armour heard of this affidavit and sent a representative to the foreman, offering him \$5,000 if he would retract his statements. The Irishman accepted the money and then signed another statement declaring that he had been bribed and the reasons for the bribery.

Sinclair had possession of both affidavits and an impressive collection of court records of guilty pleas entered by Armour and associates in various States to charges of selling adulterated meat products. Sinclair had authenticated and potentially damaging articles. The issue of Everybody's Magazine on 20 April 1906 carried Sinclair's article. Unfortunately, his article appeared on the day after the San Francisco earthquake. The nation's newspapers were filled with reports of this spectacular disaster and Sinclair's article hardly rated a mention. This unlucky timing dogged Sinclair throughout his career. Judson Grenier, a noted Sinclair scholar, had observed that on other occasions his published articles had been upstaged by significant events in history. The two most notable instances of his ill-fated timing were articles that coincided with the outbreak of the first World War in 1914 and another which appeared on the day of Lindberg's first crossing of the Atlantic.

Although the Everybody's article was unsuccessful, The Jungle continued to attract wide publicity and made Sinclair famous. As sales continued, public protest demanded an investigation of the scandals revealed. President Roosevelt,



who had been greatly impressed by the novel, answered these demands by sending Wilson, the Secretary of Agriculture, to the stockyards to investigate Sinclair's charges. But Roosevelt did not want a serious inquiry, merely a white-wash, and that is what Wilson provided. But it satisfied no one and served to only intensify the clamouring for a proper fullscale investigation.

Roosevelt invited Sinclair to dinner at the White House to discuss the novel. Sinclair afterwards related that over dinner Roosevelt had confessed 'Mr Sinclair I bear no love for those gentlemen for I ate the meat they canned'.<sup>37</sup> Ella Reeve Bloor, a close friend of Sinclair's maintains in her autobiography that Roosevelt praised Sinclair's book 'to the skies'<sup>38</sup> and later promised to send an investigating commission to the stockyards. Some days after the dinner, Roosevelt sent Sinclair a telegram instructing him to go to Washington and report before the commission. Unfortunately, he was unable to attend because of writing contracts he had accepted before the success of The Jungle. The situation was further complicated because Congress was in session to consider The Pure Food Bill. The very strong Beef Trust lobby was fighting the proposed legislation 'tooth and nail'. The threat of commission's findings coupled with the battle in Congress hardened the Beef Trust's resolve to protect its interests.

On arriving in Washington, Bloor met with A.M. Simmons, editor of the International Socialist Review, and William Boss Lloyd. Together they planned a campaign publicizing the commission. Bloor later wrote of the commission, 'As I

expected the commission did its best to tone down its reports'.<sup>39</sup> This censorship was also applied to Sinclair when Roosevelt refused to allow him to testify before Congress on the Pure Food Bill. Bloor was called to New York and wrote a series of articles for the leading newspapers on packing-house conditions.

The publicity ensured the investigation would not be quashed. Roosevelt then tried unsuccessfully to push through a substitute Inspection Bill without making the details public. The bill was automatically blocked by the beef interests within Congress and led to the releasing of a report concerning the bill. Public indignation again forced actions and hearings resumed before the House Agricultural Committee. However, the hearings were again dominated by representatives of the Beef Trust. Bloor who sat on most of the hearings, claimed that the representatives of the Trust 'were given full rein and treated with the greatest of courtesy while the members of the President's commission were treated like animals when they tried to give even mild testimony'.<sup>40</sup>

Despite the apparent collaboration between the Beef Lobby and the House Committee, Congress passed the Pure Food and Drug Act. This Act, which set decent standards in food and drug processing and retailing was perhaps the greatest concrete achievement of the muckraking era. It was also the last important event in the movement that was the final protest of the middle classes. As Ella Bloor has asserted, 'Each exposure of the Trust was thought to reveal an individual, not a symptom of the general corruption and exploitation

inevitable under capitalism. The muckraking era came to end because it had run its course. The muckraking magazines had become popular but had been forced into conformity by the advertising boycott imposed by the Trusts. Only a few of these magazines turned towards the socialist and labour movements. Just as these magazines either conformed or changed so too did those journalists and writers who had strived for reform.

Upton Sinclair was one of the few writers who remained true to both his muckraking and socialist traditions. He felt a great deal of disappointment over the rejection by many writers and supporters of their socialist ideals. He expressed this disappointment in written form some years later. Letters to a Millionaire (1939) was a series of letters written to a friend of Sinclair's who had assisted him into the packinghouse district in 1906. This friend had since become a millionaire, and when Sinclair sent him copies of his later novels, he refused to read them, claiming that his ideas were impractical. Sinclair wrote:

That a man who started life in the Chicago Stockyards should make a million dollars and acquire a private yacht and other luxuries, that is what the world understands as 'Americanism', the world admires it; and I gather that you do also.<sup>42</sup>

In the years following The Jungle Sinclair continued to write novels which were attacked as propaganda and were critically rejected as works of literature. His eternal theme was the exposure of capitalist evils. His main objective throughout his career was to bring to the notice of a 'reluctant public the evils they lived amongst'.<sup>43</sup> This life-long struggle began with the publication of The Jungle. The

novel remains his most famous and effective work, but Sinclair was realist enough to know that its impact would not last. In 1932, he wrote:

I am supposed to have helped clean up the yards and improved the country's meat supply - though this is mostly delusion. But nobody even pretends to believe I improved the condition of stockyard workers. They have no unions to speak of and their wages, in relation to the cost of living, are as low as they were 28 years ago.<sup>44</sup>

In Letters to a Millionaire, he also expressed doubts about the effectiveness of his novel.

'Thirty four years ago I was wandering about the Chicago stockyards looking into conditions and you were helping me. I had the idea I was going to help the workers out of poverty; but I failed the American people who did not care about wage earners of the packing plants; they cared only about doped and diseased meat'.<sup>44</sup>

If Sinclair was dubious about the effects of the novel, later historians were not; Joseph L. Blotner has argued 'Upton Sinclair's books were among those which marked the beginning of a transitional phase in the American novel. In theme, a new theme was added to that of political corruption; the rise of the leftist and radical forces'.<sup>45</sup>

The Jungle was the watershed of his life as a socialist because it marks the beginning of life as an active radical. Before The Jungle he and Jack London had formed the Inter-collegiate Socialist Society, but apart from this his socialist activities had generally been confined to abstract discussion. London said of his own career that he believed all his labours had only brought the revolution ten minutes nearer. Sinclair himself viewed the situation less pessimistically. He believed that The Jungle implanted a new dream in the hearts of many Americans. 'One day we shall hear from

them and see the sprouting of seed we have been scattering'.<sup>46</sup>

## THE LAST OF THE MUCKRAKE MEN

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## CHAPTER III

## HELICON HALL: FLAWED UTOPIA

Hel'i-con, n [Gr. Helikōn, Helicon]

1. A Mountain in Bœotia, in Greece, from which flowed two fountains, Aganippe and Hippocrene, sacred to the Muses. The Greeks supposed it to be the residence of Apollo and the Muses.

Webster's New Twentieth Century  
Dictionary.

Before the success of The Jungle Upton Sinclair's life had reached a literary and personal crossroads. Thereafter, the fame of that novel enabled him to pass beyond that point and ensured him a high place in literary history though it did not bring any real improvement in his personal life. In the months after the publication of The Jungle, Sinclair was enmeshed in the controversy surrounding the novel. He also tried to divide himself between the packingtown Commission's investigations, his further writing contracts and adapting the novel for the theatre. As a consequence of this heavy workload he found it almost impossible to reconcile the duties of his career as a 'novelist, muckraker, leader of the proletarian movement, prophet and scientist, with his domestic responsibilities.'<sup>1</sup> This burden of responsibility weighed heavily on his mind. He later admitted to Gaylord Wiltshire in 1909 that this burden had become 'abnormally high'<sup>2</sup> after the completion of the novel. With the notion of bringing stability to his family and personal life and providing security for them he struck upon the idea of a co-operative community.

At various times in his writing career, Sinclair had

often retired to a secluded place to research and write. One of his favourite spots was in the Adirondaks and it was here that he had observed many small co-operative communities. He borrowed ideas from these 'clubs' and drew upon the writings of Charlotte Perkins Gilman who had advocated a theory of scientific management of households. These experiences coupled with his dislike of having to live with or near those whose ideas differed from his, seemed to point towards a Utopian community based upon the doctrines of co-operation and brotherhood.

The community that Sinclair envisaged highlighted the two main problems of his early life. Firstly, the problem of family. The emphasis on a community was a 'concession to his wife's need for companionship and his son's need of confidence among people'.<sup>3</sup> The preoccupation with modernizing domestic chores was also an admission of his wife's dislike of housework. All political and idealistic considerations aside, he founded Helicon Hall 'because he desired order and ecology in his personal and family life'.<sup>4</sup> Secondly, the community illustrated Sinclair's unwillingness to face up to his problems or to deal with 'contemporary reality'.<sup>5</sup>

The colony was an escape from the city, the physical representation of injustice Sinclair sought to remedy throughout his career. Any obstruction in the way of his crusading spirit was circled rather than tackled head on. Seeing his attempts at implementing reforms in Chicago being thwarted by the owners and the President's commission, he merely struck out on a new tangent, a new crusade. Unfortunately for Sinclair he had yet to learn 'that the individual who leaves

his home to run a Utopian community colony does not lessen his problems but rather magnifies and multiplies them.<sup>6</sup>

With all these ideas and thoughts in mind, he put together a prospectus outlining his plans for a colony and had it published in The Independent. He also took advantage of the experience he had gained from the 'direct by mail' promotion of The Jungle. To his long list of correspondents, friends and customers he also sent a copy of the prospectus. In the following weeks he received about 300 replies.

By 24 June 1906, a New York Times editorial had announced that a home colony was to be established by Upton Sinclair. The editorial claimed, with mock optimism, that 'the co-operative commonwealth and Brook Farm<sup>7</sup> experiments were to be superceded, it appears, by a triumph of collective effort in homebuilding through the application of the machine process'.<sup>8</sup> The editorial hinted that Sinclair's colonists would have to be imbued with the doctrine of socialism. Although he was quoted as stating that while not regarded it as in any way an experiment in socialism, he did think that those who undertook it would have to have sympathy with 'the spirit of socialism'.<sup>9</sup> 'The spirit of socialism,' he was quick to point out, 'was the spirit of brotherhood and democracy'.<sup>10</sup>

Three weeks after the appearance of the editorial, Sinclair called a public meeting to explain his colony. The meeting drew a capacity crowd of 300 to the Berkerley Lyceum in New York. The audience reportedly<sup>11</sup> contained an equal proportion of men and women, many of whom appeared to be of foreign birth. On Sinclair's recommendation, the meeting

elected Gaylord Wiltshire as temporary Chairman. Throughout the two-hour meeting, Sinclair dominated the speaking platform. He told the audience that his plan was to apply machinery to the domestic process. The colony would syndicate the management of children and individual colonists would co-operate in the everyday running of the colony.

He went on to say that he had taken initial steps to feel the pulse of the nation and gauge its readiness for the type of colony he was proposing. His prospectus generated a great deal of interest among a wide range of people. Favourable replies had been received from a number of small investors and The Times records that doctors, bankers, brokers and prominent businessmen<sup>12</sup> were numbered among potential colonists. Although the meeting was generally orderly and well organized, it was punctuated by heckling and unruly behaviour from a minority, who brought it to a premature close, leaving many major questions unresolved.

Throughout the following months a series of meetings were held between Sinclair and the prospectus members. They decided to rent a building during the winter and complete plans for an eventual purchase. A site close to the centre of New York City was their main objective. The Times speculated, however, that land costs in this area would prove prohibitive. Added to the cost factor, a suitable site proved difficult to find. Although thwarted in his attempts to house the colony, Sinclair pressed on with his plans to finance the venture. He announced the release of \$100 shares. He retained 100 shares for himself and incorporated a stock company of \$100,000. Stockholders were guaranteed a 6 per cent return

for their investment. Provision was made for these stockholders to live at the colony. They eventually formed the Helicon Hall Home Colony, which could admit non-stockholders as club members. With the financial structure of the colony established, stockholders awaited the procurement of a building or at least a suitable site.

On 4 October 1906, Sinclair announced the purchase of Helicon Hall. This former boys' school was situated near Englewood, New Jersey, and represented a departure from what many had expected. The original owner of the school had hoped boys would be 'civilized by living in dignified surroundings'.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, a New York Times feature article on the colony expressed surprise at Sinclair's choice of the Englewood location. It seemed to epitomize everything a social reformer might exclude from his ideal society. The asceticism that seemed to characterize the fighting socialist writer was replaced by 'palatial' surroundings. The main building boasted a swimming pool, bowling alley, theatre and a conservatory filled with luxuriant tropical plants. The centrepiece was a courtyard surrounded by fifty self-contained bedrooms. The external architecture was a combination of ornamental porticos, rows of white pillars and ivy covered walls. The grounds were equally impressive. The Hall stood in a park containing nine and a half acres of cultivated land and bordered by fifteen miles of forest.

In a long and lavishly illustrated article, a New York Times reporter interviewed some of the men and women involved with the colony's establishment. Shortly after securing the property, Sinclair had left for the Adirondaks supposedly to

await further developments, and was unavailable for comment. Of the other two signatories of the deeds of exchange, L.A. Makeil, a Russian lawyer, proved to be tight-lipped about the colony. All he would confirm was that the project was 'not socialism, only co-operation'.<sup>14</sup> The other signatory, Edwin S. Potter, was much more co-operative. He was described by The Times as 'running some kind of news agency'<sup>15</sup> and as 'a publisher of a monthly periodical devoted to the propagation of advanced thought'.<sup>16</sup> The 'socialist' publisher was favourable to any publicity for the colony.

Potter saw the Home Colony as being composed of two types of people. Firstly, those who had capital, and secondly, those who were salaried. The capitalists owned the stock company and thus the external buildings. They rented accommodation to the salaried faction and acted as landlord. This is perhaps an oversimplification but it was the basis of the internal mechanism that operated within Helicon Hall. In their capacity as landlord, the stockholders collected a fixed board from all residents. By February 1907, these charges had been set at \$3 a week for a single room. Food was assessed at \$5 a week and the cost of the communal child care \$4 a week. These rates were, for the period, very reasonable. One college professor who lived at the colony with his wife and two children for \$105 a month, found this to be less than the cost of similar accommodation in New York.

Potter explained in the article that the colony would be run by a board of directors elected by secret ballot every six months. Majority rule would prevail and all tenants could vote on all questions except those concerning financial

matters. Membership of the colony would be decided by another democratically elected committee which would conduct extensive investigations into the personal suitability of each candidate. Above all, as stressed in a later interview, it was necessary 'to recognise the fact that there are exceptional individuals whose habits and ideas would render them uncongenial'.<sup>17</sup> All successful unmarried candidates would live in the central hall, while married couples could purchase land from the stock company and build small cabins and bungalows. If a family left the colony their house could be sold back to the company. Private kitchens and servants were outlawed,<sup>18</sup> in theory, and meals were to be served and eaten communally.

Potter admitted that these aspects of the colony hinted at a more communalistic approach than had been originally envisaged. He believed many critics would focus on the more experimental features and dismiss the colony as another Brook Farm.

From the beginning, Sinclair's colony was the centre of controversy. The press quickly latched onto any scandal concerning Helicon Hall and often tried to invent trouble, where there was none. The spectre of experiments like Brook Farm, J.A. Wayland's socialist colony in Ruskin, Tennessee, and the co-operative commonwealth, continued to haunt the colony. To many of the colonists, favourable public opinion was of great importance. This was not because the colony depended on public support for its existence but, rather because the colonists did not want to bear the brunt of the adverse publicity that Sinclair seemed always to attract.

Because of the American public's association of free

love with socialism, the colony was stigmatized by the press as being immoral as well as radical. Stories of Sinclair's 'love nest' appeared in the newspapers.

'It was generally taken for granted' Sinclair wrote, 'among the newspaper men of New York that the purpose for which I started this colony was to have plenty of mistresses handy ... I do not know of any assemblage of forty adults where a higher standard of sexual morality prevailed'.<sup>19</sup>

Some writers<sup>20</sup> have suggested that the only real immorality was the weekly colony dance and even the most ardent critics<sup>21</sup> concluded that the sexual mores of the colony were almost prudish. At least one writer,<sup>22</sup> however, has suggested that Sinclair's protestations may have been hypocritical.

The diaries kept by Sinclair's first wife, Meta, describe an affair he had while at Helicon Hall. The affair with Anna, the wife of Professor Noyes and Sinclair's confession of his adultery were described 'in such detail as to make the affair seem real'.<sup>23</sup> Although the experiment, as Sinclair termed the liaison, lasted only two weeks, Meta's diaries also reveal that both Meta and Upton had become disposed to 'falling in love' after the publication of The Jungle.

The second major charge levelled at the colony was aimed at its radical nature. Again writers<sup>24</sup> have suggested this is an exaggeration. With the exception of its child rearing practices, Helicon Hall was not radical. It was populated mainly by literary couples with one or two children, who were kept intellectually busy. Despite these facts, stories and articles continued to highlight a wide range of 'events' at Helicon Hall. In February 1907 alone, there were articles extending from evidence of racial discrimination to inhospitality to visitors to the advocacy of air-baths for



babies. One adverse story concerned D.C. Serber, who claimed to have been barred from the colony because he was a Jew. He had originally been a member of two planning committees and had actually helped to choose the Helicon Hall location. In a carefully-worded letter to The New York Times, Sinclair denied that the colony excluded Serber because of his race and declared that his exclusion was because he was considered 'personally uncongenial to other members'.<sup>25</sup>

Although the colony was subjected to close scrutiny by a number of outside sources, it appeared to weather them well. Internally, however, there developed a number of problems. None were crucial to the colony's existence but they did underline definite flaws in its structure. The first problem involved the child rearing practices. One colonist, who was an ardent socialist moved into the colony with her husband, a Tennessee surgeon. She could not accept the separation of children from their parents and consequently left the community. This planned segregation was highlighted in a series of articles by The New York Times. The Children's Committee, established at the conclusion of the original Lyceum meeting, stated: 'It is part of the implication of the colony plan that children should have a life and environment of their own.'<sup>26</sup> Their second suggestion had been: 'They should not be permitted to frequent the meeting places of their elders'.<sup>27</sup>

In a later editorial The Times described the colony's child rearing practices as 'putting all the children in a sort of mitigated orphan asylum'.<sup>28</sup> They went as far as to claim that these ideas were no more advanced than the usual kindergarten 'by which mothers not at all "advanced" relieve them-

selves of the trouble of playing with their own offspring except when they happen to feel like it'.<sup>29</sup>

The second major problem concerned servants. In the original prospectus, and throughout the inaugural meeting, the servant dilemma had received a great deal of attention. The committee formed to discuss labour brought forward as many as twelve suggestions. The main aim, it said, was to work for equality. This meant that the status of servants was unacceptable. The committee's recommendation stated:

Because the presence of servants in the household implies irresponsibility and indifference the colony should adopt a fundamental principle that none of the domestic service should be done by persons who cannot be admitted to all privileges of the colony.<sup>30</sup>

In reality these high ideals were compromised from the beginning. There was a gradual need for fulltime employees within the colony. The idea of avoiding the servant problem in a co-operative community engaged in intellectual pursuits by syndicating domestic work proved to be unworkable. In a story which appeared in the New York Times on 14 February it seemed that the colony had solved its servant problem, as a Helicon Hall housekeeper agreed in an interview with a Times reporter. When asked 'How do the colonists like domestic work?', she replied, 'Why good gracious, they don't do any of it. We hire people to do that. No I don't think it was ever a part of Mr Sinclair's idea to have the colonists to do work of that kind. Anyhow they don't do it'.<sup>31</sup>

The third problem that faced the colony was unwanted guests, especially hostile journalists, who made frequent attempts to enter the colony. Equally troublesome were interested and creative people who were considered uncongenial to

other members of the colony. One of the most infamous examples of unwanted guests being turned away received widespread media coverage. Sadakichi Hartmann, a Japanese-German art critic, arrived late one evening, claiming to have received a week-long invitation. He arrived with two companions and was apparently drunk. Having been given a meal, he was asked to leave. In a letter to The Times he claimed to have been thrown out into a stormy night at two o'clock in the morning. Although there are conflicting reports about the events of that evening it does appear Sinclair was justifiably annoyed and that Hartmann's confessed aim was to get a story for a leading newspaper.

In general, however, the Hall, as a community was a success. In a financial report to stockholders in February 1907, Sinclair projected that despite paying out \$5,000 in salaries the colony would show a year profit of \$1,000 if the capacity of seventy residents could be maintained. Although financial security and a waiting list of 300 indicate popular interest, the real success of the colony can best be measured by its social and intellectual life. The colony attracted some of the foremost writers and thinkers of the day. John Dewey, for example, was a frequent visitor, as was William James, Anarchists Emma Goldman and John Coryell, and sculptor Jo Davidson. College dropouts Sinclair Lewis and Alan Updegraff both tended the colony's furnaces during their holidays. These varied people found the atmosphere there stimulating and open. Lewis was to remark in later years, when he had become an established writer, that 'he looked back on his Helicon Hall days as a rewarding experience'.<sup>32</sup>

However, despite the financial and artistic success, idealistically Helicon Hall represents a fundamental compromise of Sinclair's original aims. Bloodworthy<sup>33</sup> notes that, in an article written four months before the purchase of the colony, Sinclair admitted the uselessness of community or Utopian socialism. He believed true socialists worked for the proletarian movement and to forward the revolution. Bloodworthy cites another statement Sinclair made in Cosmopolitan when he claimed that no amount of literary fame could prevent him from participating actively to aid the proletarian revolution. Nevertheless, despite these assertions, Sinclair allowed himself to enter into a form of middle class Utopian socialism, violating his own stated principles.

This is a clear illustration of the inconsistency of intention that characterized his career. He often professed opinions and values fashioned of emotion rather than controlled by his intellect. He therefore found it often hard in reality to implement what he professed idealistically. This compromise of ideals left him very open to criticism and in the case of Helicon Hall his inconsistency was very evident. He always maintained that the colony was not a microcosm of a socialist system, yet it fostered socialistic living and converted most of its non-socialist members. Writing in his autobiography years later, Sinclair seemed to have completely forgotten his 1906 statements when he described his colony as a 'Utopia'.

His 'Utopia' lasted only seven months. The short life-span ended abruptly on the night of 16 March 1907 when fire swept through Helicon Hall. Of the seventy residents living

at the colony all but one escaped to safety. A carpenter, Lester Briggs, died in the fire. The reason for the fire was never discovered, although Sinclair always believed it resulted from an act of premeditated sabotage. He maintained in his autobiography that it was a plot by members of the Steel Trust to destroy his work. He based this accusation on evidence given by fellow colonists. Some claimed to have heard a number of small explosions before the alarm was raised. Others reported seeing figures running from the main building shortly before the fire was discovered. Added to this circumstantial evidence was the discovery of a stick of dynamite wedged in a crevice in a cellar. It had been unearthed during excavations for a building extension. Although the dynamite was of an indeterminate age, it did give some credence to Sinclair's claims.

Sinclair declined to make 'unfounded charges' in the newspapers, but reminded a reporter that he had had in his possession, a number of affidavits, involving high-ranking steel officials, on charges of graft. This fact according to Sandar was common knowledge in Pittsburg. At the time of the fire, he was using this material to write an expose of the steel industry and he regarded the fire as a warning. He was also quoted as saying 'I have been told if the elder Armour had been alive when I exposed the Beef Trust I would not have lived'.<sup>34</sup> Notwithstanding his allegations, which prompted Ernest Koester, Public Prosecutor of Bergen County, to assign detectives to investigate the fire, in hindsight it seems hard to believe Sinclair's claims.

Even the colonists were divided on the causes of the

fire. The minority who believed in the sabotage theory 'were living in the front of the Hall and based their claim on the mystery explosions'. The majority led by stockholder Edwin Bjorkman and chemist Ernest Eberlein, believed the fire had been caused by a build-up of leaking gas from organ pipes. After a detailed investigation by Koester and his detectives, a trial was held to determine the cause of the fire.

During the trial, County Coroner, A.D. Lees, was on the stand for two hours and questioned thoroughly by prosecutor John S. McKay, who conducted his case on the assumption that the fire had 'incendiary origins'. In evidence, the coroner produced an anonymous letter he had received, post-marked in Englewood and signed 'One who knows'. The letter declared:

If you want to get to the truth concerning the Helicon Hall fire probe find out who is to gain by the fire. The plan was a miscarriage therefore a life was lost. Force the Hahn Woman to tell all. Put Sinclair on the rack. Edwin Bjorkman can give you some facts if he is forced.<sup>35</sup>

Despite the obvious questions raised by the letter, Sinclair's own evidence and several pieces of seemingly conflicting testimony, the jury returned a unanimous verdict; of severe censure of both the stockholding company and the colony's lack of adequate fire protection. No provision for fire escapes had been made and the jury declared that the life lost resulted from criminal carelessness.

The affair dropped out of the news until a letter to the New York Times renewed speculation about the colony as having been incompetently administered and lacking sound leadership. During trial evidence Sinclair had admitted relinquishing some 'sovereignty' because of writing commit-

ments. Mrs Emma Hahn, manager of the Hall in her evidence placed responsibility for the colony's demise squarely on Sinclair's shoulders. She claimed he had refused to listen to her protestations of dissension among the colonists. When asked by the prosecutor 'Don't you think that Helicon Hall was a wild dream of Mr Sinclair's'? she replied, 'I don't like to answer that question but things were in a bad state'. In a later interview, Mrs Hahn's husband claimed the colony was overcrowded, unprotected and lacked adequate fire measures.

During the short lifespan of Helicon Hall its inhabitants and the events which took place within its walls were both controversially and widely reported by the media. The suspicious circumstances of the fire which eventually ended the colony added further to the legend. Sinclair had invested a large sum of money (about \$30,000) into the project. But most sources<sup>36</sup> seem to agree that with insurance money he appears to have come out even. He, however, lost all his personal belongings, most of his books and personal papers. With the failure of his attempt to bring stability to his family he once again faced family unrest and financial insecurity.

## HELICON HALL: FLAWED UTOPIA

- 1 William Bloodworthy Jr., Upton Sinclair (Boston Twayne, 1977) p.209.
- 2 IBID, p.209.
- 3 IBID, p.209.
- 4 IBID, p.209.
- 5 IBID, p.209.
- 6 Leon Harris, American Rebel, p.98.
- 7 Brook Farm and the co-operative commonwealths were ill-fated communities which aimed at collectivising work and creating an environment conducive to art, literature and learning. They suffered from adverse publicity and internal disharmony which eventually led to their dissolution.
- 8 New York Times, 24 June 1906, p.8:4.
- 9 IBID, p.8:4.
- 10 IBID, p.8:4.
- 11 The reporter assigned to the meeting makes some interesting observations. For example, he concludes the meeting was made up of many socialists 'judging from their manifestations of sympathy for socialist doctrines. The mentioning of two newspapers which disapprove of socialism on their editorial pages was hissed'. Therefore any newspaper reports of the time cannot be considered impartial.
- 12 New York Times, 24 June 1906, p.8:4.
- 13 New York Times, 7 October 1906, p.2.
- 14 IBID, p.2.
- 15 IBID, p.2.
- 16 IBID, p.2.
- 17 New York Times, 10 August 1906, p.5:2.
- 18 IBID, p.5:2.
- 19 Bloodworthy, Upton Sinclair, pp.210-12.
- 20 Bloodworthy in particular has argued this point of view.
- 21 Bloodworthy points out that even Michael Williams who dis-



liked Sinclair admitted in his autobiography that the colony's sexual mores bordered on the prudish.

- 22 Leon Harris, Upton Sinclair, American Rebel, (New York, Cromwell 1975), p.95.
- 23 IBID, p.95.
- 24 Bloodworthy, p.215.
- 25 New York Times, 12 November 1906, p.6:6.
- 26 New York Times, 10 August 1906, p.5:2.
- 27 IBID, p.5:2.
- 28 New York Times, 14 February 1907, p.16:1.
- 29 IBID, p.16:1.
- 30 New York Times, 10 August 1906, p.5:2.
- 31 New York Times, 14 February 1907, p.16:1.
- 32 Bloodworthy, Upton Sinclair, p.217.
- 33 IBID, p.217.
- 34 New York Times, 17 March, p.1:7.
- 35 New York Times, 22 March, p.3:2.
- 36 Harris, American Rebel, p.98.

## CHAPTER IV

PROLIFIC WRITER'S CRAMP VERSUS  
LITERARY FECUNDITY

Child wandering down the great world for a day  
And with a child's soul seeing through and through  
The passing prejudice to truth's own view  
Immortal spirit robed in mortal clay  
Striving to find and follow the one way  
That is your way, none others - to be true  
To that which makes a sincere man of you!  
Still be yourself, and let tongues say their say!  
Still fling the seed with daring hand abroad,  
And, then mayhap, the race to come will be  
Gladdened, with ripened fruit and bursting pod  
Of love of brotherhood, and liberty  
Open to nature and her laws from God  
As spreading gulfs he open to the sea.

Harry Kemp's Sonnet to  
Upton Sinclair.

Sinclair found The Jungle a very hard act to follow. The demise of Helicon Hall was a telling illustration. The work Sinclair produced during his Utopian period proved financially and artistically inferior to The Jungle. Doubleday Page, in anticipation of even greater rewards from Sinclair's novels, had contracted to republish all four of his earlier unsuccessful novels. They then readily accepted and published in 1907 The Overman and The Industrial Republic. The first was originally composed at the turn of the century while the second had been almost totally written at Helicon Hall. The Industrial Republic, which included a chapter about Helicon Hall, was virtually Sinclair's socialist philosophy. The novel sold poorly and the predictions and prophecies he made were so embarrassing to the author that it remains one of the few books Sinclair never reprinted. The Overman suffered a similar fate.

After these initial setbacks Sinclair embarked on what is often referred to as The New York Trilogy. The first part

was The Metropolis. Having written about the wage slaves, Sinclair then decided to expose the other end of the scale. The novel was concerned with New York's high society. The final result was rejected by Doubleday Page, universally dismissed by critics and even disliked by its author. Writing thirty years later in his autobiography, Sinclair regretted ignoring the lesson that The Metropolis offered him:

The reason The Metropolis is a poor book is not because I did not have the material but because I had too much. Also I wrote it in a hurry under the most unhappy circumstances. The career of a novelist is enough for one man and the foundation of colonies and starting of reform organization and conducting of political campaigns had better been left to persons of tougher fibre. It took me thirty years to learn the lesson thoroughly and in the meantime I lost the reading public which The Jungle had brought me.<sup>1</sup>

Some critics have suggested that the period directly after the publication of The Jungle was the one time in Sinclair's literary career when he was 'fashionable'. However, the audience captured by The Jungle rapidly became disenchanted with Sinclair's attempts to raise money by turning out hastily-written 'pot-boilers'. The paranoia with which Sinclair had viewed the Helicon Hall fire re-emerged in this period. He read sinister overtones in Doubleday Page's rejection of his Metropolis manuscripts. The company's representative claimed that the manuscript did not reflect the reality of the New York scenes. Sinclair was bitterly disappointed. He maintained that 'Doubleday Page had made a fortune out of The Jungle and used it to become the richest and most reactionary publishing house in the country. I bade them a sad farewell'.<sup>2</sup>

Sinclair then contracted to serialize the novel in the American magazine. Shortly after the monthly instalments began appearing there, Moffat Yard and Company agreed to publish The

Metropolis in novel form. Both The Metropolis and the second of the trilogy, The Moneychangers, achieved only moderate success. The success can be gauged by Sinclair's conclusion that 'he just sold enough to write another book'.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately the other book inevitably failed as badly as its predecessor.

In many passages of The Jungle Sinclair reached his most ardently socialist stance. Prior to his experiences in Chicago, he had been converted to socialism and had joined the Socialist Party. As a consequence, The Jungle emerged as a truly proletarian novel. Its final sixty pages disintegrated into blatant socialist propaganda. Sinclair the committed socialist, extolled the advances of the Party in previous years, he faithfully recorded the 350 per cent increase in the socialist vote of 1905 and noted that 'the revolution was close at hand'. The novel ends dramatically with an impassioned plea by a socialist orator.

Sinclair's orator tempers his enthusiasm for the spectacular rise in Party popularity. He admitted to a large audience that he was 'fearful of this tremendous vote'.<sup>4</sup> He urges the party to organize their new voters, the majority of whom were not socialists. In emotive, almost fanatical tones, the orator's last words echo the true socialist aims of the author:

... We shall organize them, we shall drill them, we shall marshall them for victory. We shall bear down on the opposition, we shall sweep it before us - and Chicago will be ours! Chicago will be ours! Chicago will be ours!<sup>5</sup>

This call for the unification and organization of the proletariat mirrors Marx'and Engels'concluding battlecry in

their 1848 communist manifesto:

'Let the ruling class tremble at the prospect of a communist revolution. Proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Proletarians of all lands unite!'<sup>6</sup>

From this radical stance Sinclair's socialism became increasingly moderate. The Helicon Hall experiment, as already noted, has been viewed by many critics as a virtual betrayal of his socialist principles. By embarking on a type of Utopian Socialism he appeared to be turning his back on the aims and values proclaimed in the final pages of The Jungle. Whether Sinclair's enthusiasm for socialism was beginning to wane is doubtful. He would continue to preach socialism for the rest of his life. However, it was a very different form from the one which emerged in 1906.

It is clear that he was gradually diverging from the Socialist Party. He was subjected to increasing alienation because of his propensity for self-promotion and personal publicity. Whereas critics 'attribute its incessant use to simple vanity',<sup>7</sup> Sinclair insisted that the only way to circulate and publicize socialist ideas was to have a high public profile. With this idea and technique definitely in mind Sinclair set out to attack the 'system' by directly assailing the two most powerful men in America.

In his novel The Moneychangers Sinclair examined the financial panic of 1907. He contended that it had been manufactured by the financial manipulations of J.P. Morgan. Basing his information on the evidence of a lawyer, Edward Kelly, he was one of the only men to openly accuse Morgan and his associates of conspiracy. Historians have subsequently accepted the panic as a 'rich man's panic', but at the same

time Sinclair's censure severely undermined the mythical prestige of the American businessman. Despite the sensational nature of his accusations only the 'Yellow' press bothered to investigate his accusation.

The New York American and the New York World both carried front page stories of Sinclair's assertions. He predicted that by focussing on the crimes of famous figures, newspapers would be unable to resist printing these stories and in doing so would indirectly popularize his various causes. These causes to Sinclair were the causes of the party. However, the party viewed Sinclair's methods of publicity-seeking very differently. He found himself increasingly stigmatized by socialists and the media as being purely a publicity seeker.

On many occasions during this period, Sinclair's front page allegations proved to be ill-founded and embarrassing both to their perpetrator and the party. The allegations were often conceived out of hurried and superficial research and Sinclair's own paranoia and his all-consuming obsession with his own causes, Sinclair's lengthy running battle with the press is extensively recorded in one of his most famous pamphlets. The Brass Check was the culmination of editing years of stored up charges against the various agents of the 'capitalist' press.

L.A. Fretz contends that although his books contain countless indictments of the capitalist cullure he rarely documented them. Fretz believes:

The reader simply has to accept Sinclair's word that he never knowingly published a falsehood.<sup>8</sup>

Sinclair said of The Brass Check:

It was a book of facts that no one could dispute, because I saved the clippings, and I verified every story that I told.<sup>9</sup>

Fretz concludes:

He implied that this was also true for his other muckraking books. To lend further credence to his books, Sinclair maintained that he had never been forced to retract any of the assertions as a result of a libel suit. I believe that on this point Sinclair can be trusted. One impression which stands out from a critical study of his books, plays, articles, letters and manuscripts is the man's unflinching candor and integrity.<sup>10</sup>

A brief career with The Evening Post as a writer of obituaries launched Sinclair upon the mission of a lifetime - that of 'clamouring for recognition'.<sup>11</sup> He was convinced that by being labelled a self-seeker in his early days, he would continue to carry that stigma throughout his career. The most visible effect was editorial censorship. Anything originating from Sinclair was often condemned to obscurity. Because he had become 'persona non grata' for many newspapers, his effectiveness as a Socialist Party spokesman was severely undermined. Although the attitude of the press did not reflect that of the whole nation it was not lost on the Socialist Party hierarchy.

The fact that one of the chief party spokesmen was both subjected to press censorship and open to editorial ridicule embarrassed and frightened the conservative members of the party executive. Their fears were not allayed when Sinclair hit the headlines with the Helicon Hall scandal and the controversy surrounding his marriage and eventual divorce. Between 1907 and 1913 the seeds of Sinclair's alienation from the party were effectively sown. The socialism he had preached in the concluding pages of The Jungle was still present in

doctrine, but its direction had changed. Sinclair would follow his own path, one which diverged greatly from that followed by the Socialist Party. Although intersecting on occasions their paths remained separate and defined. In the Ludlow Massacre campaign of 1913 this separation was made very clear.

However in the late 1907 and early 1908 Sinclair was still a paid up and active member of the Socialist Party. In The Industrial Republic (1907) he had enthusiastically predicted that socialism would be firmly established in America by 1913. He then set about realising this idealistic dream by writing a series of novels and at dissecting the capitalist system and showing the working man in simple terms the forces that controlled his existence.

Sinclair had earlier received an advance from a publisher to write a sequel to The Metropolis. With this in mind he and his family left for Lake Placid to spend the summer writing what would become The Moneychangers. During that summer, he spent much time with the novelist H.G. Wells, who later sent Sinclair a copy of Modern Utopia inscribing it charmingly, 'To the most hopeful of socialists from the next most hopeful'.<sup>12</sup> In the following winter Sinclair completed the final instalment of his trilogy The Machine, in Coconut Grove, Florida:

I think it was during these six weeks that I wrote The Machine the play which forms a sequel to The Moneychangers, an odd sort of trilogy, two novels and a play. But it was the best I could do at the time. I saw a vision of myself as a prosperous Broadway dramatist, a licensed court jester of capitalism. But the vision proved to be a mirage.<sup>13</sup>

When Sinclair wrote 'it was the best I could do',<sup>14</sup> he was making a very accurate description of his work. Before



the completion of The Machine and after the publication of the New York Trilogy, his health was very poor. Long hours of solitary writing in isolated cabins and camps, with hastily-prepared and eaten meals, had left him with severe stomach problems.

He suffered constant discomfort and was often forced to stop writing because of physical and mental exhaustion. In an attempt to alleviate his suffering Sinclair embarked upon a number of radical fad diets. He ran the full gamut from vegetarianism to totally protein diets, visiting several nutritional clinics and sanitariums and consulted dietitians and food technologists. Although most proved ineffective, Sinclair's optimism never waned and he was always willing to try anything new.

During these years, his health problems were compounded by a disintegrating and unhappy marriage. One of his main aims at Helicon Hall had been to establish a stable environment in which to raise his son and to consolidate his marriage. The tragic fire that decimated the colony effectively destroyed any hope of achieving these dual goals. Sinclair's marriage to Meta Fuller became increasingly strained and eventually led to a prolonged and well-publicized divorce.

Due to a legal technicality, his first divorce suit was rejected by the American courts. Leaving the United States, he travelled to Holland, a country with easier divorce laws. While there he was granted a termination of his marriage. Although freed from the confines of a harmful relationship, Sinclair viewed the failure of his marriage as a bitter

blow. The bitterness was reflected in a statement he issued on 23 August 1911. He announced that he was about to bring action for divorce, naming his friend and one time protégé Harry Kemp as co-respondent. In the statement Sinclair was quoted in the New York Times as saying:

Marriage in this day is nothing but legalized slavery. That is the most polite word to call it. I fancy the average married woman is bought just as, any home or any dog is bought<sup>15</sup>

Despite these ideas on matrimony, he remarried to Mary Craig Kimborough, whom he remained married to for the next fifty years. The former Miss Kimborough was from a wealthy and aristocratic Southern family, a background from which Sinclair could trace his own heritage. His personal and public life between 1907 and 1913 was dominated by a quest for emotional and financial stability. This quest led him through a number of novels, alternative communities and public controversies.

After a winter spent writing in Bermuda, Sinclair returned to the United States and started writing a new novel in the summer of 1909. Samuel the Seeker was intended to take the form of a religious parable putting the socialist argument into a simple story 'which could carry it to the minds which otherwise would never get it'.<sup>16</sup> In his autobiography Sinclair admitted that he had aimed to create something naïve and symbolic like The Vicar of Wakefield or Pilgrims Progress. The final product, however, was slammed by the critics and considered "wretched" even by his friends.<sup>17</sup>

During the summer of 1909, spent at Cutchoque, Sinclair employed a young assistant and secretary who lived with the family. He considered him 'to be a youth after my

own heart',<sup>18</sup> describing his young assistant as a 'vegetarian, teetotaller, non-smoker, pacifist, philosophical anarchist, conscientious objector to capitalism, dreamer and practitioner of brotherhood',<sup>19</sup> Sinclair's cognizance of, and identification with these doctrines and character traits is a good indication of his pre-World War I stance. It was a 'Sinclair' that would temporarily disappear during the war years only to re-emerge stronger and more committed during the disillusionment of the post-war period.

Sinclair then began the first of a number of pilgrimages to alternative communities. In the winter of 1910 Sinclair took his family to a single tax colony at Fairhope on Mobile Bay in Alabama. While staying there he wrote a three act play comedy called The Nature Woman. It followed the path of all of Sinclair's attempts at drama straight into obscurity. Throughout a career that spanned practically every medium he never achieved the stage success that he felt he so richly deserved. His dramas and comedies, covering a wide range of subjects, failed both commercially and artistically to capture any substantial following.

While at Fairhope, Sinclair's marital problems came to a climax with his wife deciding she wanted a divorce. Any hope of reconciliation was put beyond doubt a few months later when the Sinclairs moved to another single tax colony in Arden, Delaware, founded and run by Frank Stephens. There his wife met and fell in love with Harry Kemp whom Sinclair later named as a co-respondent in his divorce. While at Arden, there came a reappearance of Sinclair's obsession with diet and health. He was persuaded to write a

series of articles for the health magazine, Physical Culture. The fee from these writing assignments was to be his main source of income during his time at Arden. Sinclair combined his obsession with physical health with a new régime of diets he had adopted while at Fairhope.

Just as controversy had surrounded his Helicon Hall colony Arden was subjected to close scrutiny by the press. One case which gained a certain infamy was that of George Brown, an anarchist shoemaker who lived at the colony. On the recommendation of the colony's executive committee, Brown was arrested for disturbing the peace. He was charged and sentenced to five days on the State Penitentiary 'rockpile'. While he languished in prison, a vengeful Brown, upset over his treatment by his fellow colonists, plotted revenge. After his release he reported to the police that members of the colony regularly played baseball on Sundays. This infringed a long-forgotten statute of 1793, prohibiting the playing of sport on Sundays in the State of Delaware. Eleven members of the colony were eventually summoned and charged before the court. Also charged was Sinclair who had on many occasions played tennis on Sundays. Each received eighteen hours on the Rockpile. Significantly, it was the beginning of Sinclair's chequered and sporadic career as a 'prisoner of conscience'.

After Samuel the Seeker Sinclair's novels took on a 'socio-sexual or personal orientation'. In 1911 he wrote the semi-autobiographical Loves Pilgrimage in which he chronicled his first marriage and the reasons for its break-up. It is considered by some critics as one of his better

works. In 1913 the prolific Sinclair published three works, Damaged Goods which dealt with venereal disease, Sylvia and Sylvia's Marriage. The latter novels are perhaps most notable for their advocacy of birth control practices and a vivid description of a childbirth both of which were very advanced for their time. With Sinclair's marriage in 1913 to Mary Craig Kimborough came stability, and his leap-frogging from colony to colony ceased, and he abandoned his fad diets for new causes and crusades.

PROLIFIC WRITER'S CRAMP VERSUS  
LITERARY FECUNDITY

- 1 Sinclair, Candid Reminiscences, p.168.
- 2 IBID, p.172.
- 3 IBID, p.180.
- 4 The Jungle, p.411.
- 5 IBID, p.412.
- 6 Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels, The Communist Manifesto.
- 7 Leon Harris, Upton Sinclair: American Rebel, (New York, Cromwell, 1975), p.91.
- 8 L.A. Fretz, Upton Sinclair and the Jazz Age, ANZASA Bulletin, Vol.1, No.6, 1974, p.19.
- 9 IBID, p.19.
- 10 IBID, p.19.
- 11 Judson Grenier, Upton Sinclair and The Press: The Brass Check reconsidered. Journalism Quarterly, Vol 49, 1972, p.428.
- 12 Sinclair, Candid Reminiscences, p.180.
- 13 IBID, p.183.
- 14 IBID, p.183.
- 15 New York Times, 22 April 1914, p.275. 1:2.
- 16 Sinclair, Candid Reminiscences, p.192.
- 17 IBID, p.193.
- 18 IBID, p.193.
- 19 IBID, p.193.

## CHAPTER V

## THE LUDLOW MASSACRE CAMPAIGN

On 14 May, Sinclair addressed a mass meeting of over two thousand people assembled at the State Capitol. He said,

... I say that the coal operators of your state have carried on a campaign of systematic and deliberate murder. Their purpose was robbery. None other purpose. They wanted the larger profits which they could get if they worked their miners as slaves instead of free American citizens ... I say that to permit them to win this strike by the methods they have used is to encourage the systematic and wholesale murder of working men everywhere throughout the United States. I say that to force a just settlement of this strike is to serve notice upon corporations everywhere throughout the United States that government by mine thugs and gunmen must cease. I say that the issue before us is now one simple issue of fundamental morality. Rockefeller has murdered labour. Shall he be permitted to rob the corpse?

John Graham, Upton Sinclair  
and the Ludlow Massacre.

On the night of 27 April 1914 Upton Sinclair sat in Carnegie Hall and listened with three thousand others to the bloody and horrific accounts of a massacre in the Colorado coalfields. Labelled 'The Ludlow Massacre', the vivid descriptions of its events and ultimate results outraged Sinclair's humanitarian ideals. He believed the account of the atrocities committed against striking Colorado miners and their families would never reach the national press. Therefore, his immediate response was to organize a campaign of protest. He hoped by this method to publicize the plight of the workers and highlight the oppressive regime of the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company which owned the mines at the

centre of the dispute.

The Ludlow Massacre was the culmination of a strike which began in September 1913. The miners in Southern Colorado rebelled against harsh conditions in the coal company camps. The companies exercised a feudal authority over the lives of their employees. Many lived in fortified camps patrolled and governed by company guards and officials. These officials regulated visitors ensuring that any dissidents or union organizers were blacklisted and 'sent down the mountains'. The company held a stranglehold on every facet of the employees' personal and family life. Miners were housed in company accommodation, bought their groceries and general supplies at a company store, their children attended a company school and were taught by a company-employed teacher.

Company authority was rigidly enforced and any man who did not adhere to it was in danger of suffering a beating, losing his job or, in extreme cases, his life. The most visible agent of oppression was the huge Colorado Fuel and Iron Company controlled by the Rockefeller Empire. Just prior to the strike, control of the CFI had been handed over to John S. Rockefeller Jnr. His accession to power had not resulted in any liberalization of conditions. The tentacles of the company had a far-reaching impact. It controlled the leading county and federal officials to the point where they could effectively manipulate elections. This political control, though often crude, was very effective. One source estimated that in 1904 alone the CFI spent over \$80,000 on the annual elections. Thus with the camp under the tyranny of a company-appointed marshall and any recourse to the polls blocked, the



miners were being progressively backed into a corner.

However, the real issue that emerged in 1913 and eventually sparked off the strike was the question of unionization. Throughout the coal fields the United Mine Workers' Union had been gaining a foothold in the mining camps. Union organizers had been infiltrating the Colorado Camps, spreading the gospel of solidarity and establishing fledgling branches. The miners had come to realize that only by collective action could they institute changes and reforms. The coal companies reacted violently to any call for unions, contending that they robbed the operators of their 'right' to dictate terms of employment. Predictably, the coal companies refused to negotiate with any union representatives.

With all channels effectively blocked, the union was forced to call a strike. At least five thousand of the estimated eleven thousand miners heeded the call. The strike was characterized by the use of hundreds of newly-deputized strike breakers and the wholesale importation of 'scab' labour. The operators applied pressure to Governor Elias M. Ammons demanding that he order the state militia to intervene and break the strike. The most alarming aspect of the dispute to this point was the violence it engendered. After five months of the conflict, eighteen men were dead and several hundred had been injured.

Finally, on 28 October, a reluctant Governor Ammons succumbed to pressure and ordered in the State Militia. The Governor continued in several unsuccessful attempts to reconcile differences between the union and the operators. With a virtual stalemate, the federal government intervened and

established, under the auspices of President Woodrow Wilson, two separate congressional investigating committees. With the confidence that it was now a federal matter, Ammons ordered the gradual withdrawal of the militia. Remaining in the field were a number of units containing auxiliary troops who were on the CFI payroll, formerly employed as camp guards and officials. On 20 April 1914 the strike reached a sudden violent climax. Two companies of the Colorado National Guard, predominantly financed and manned by coal company employees, machine-gunned and burnt a tent colony of striking miners and their families on the fields surrounding Ludlow. Twenty-one men, women and children lost their lives in the massacre.

The Rocky Mountain News reported:

Out of this infamy one fact stands clear. Machine guns were in the hands of mine guards, most of whom were members of the militia. It was a private war with the wealth of the richest man in the world behind the mine guards.<sup>1</sup>

The survivors of Ludlow and their fellow strikers launched a series of reprisals on mine property. This 'Civil War' dragged on until 30 April when President Wilson ordered federal troops to Colorado. When the strike was finally quashed, ten days later, the death toll had reached nearly fifty. Shortly after the Ludlow Massacre, a small deputation of United Mine Workers' Union members travelled to New York to publicize the atrocities committed under the banner of law and order. It was the eloquence and sincerity of their appeal that so impressed Sinclair that night at Carnegie Hall. His resolve was further strengthened in the days after the meeting when the stories of the final days of the Colorado coal miners' strike became public. So horrific were the events of the later

stages of the strike and the massacre that the official report concluded:

This rebellion constituted perhaps one of the nearest approaches to civil war and revolution ever known in this country in connection with an industrial conflict.<sup>2</sup>

Sinclair's reaction to the report and to the subsequent lack of media publicity of the events of the massacre was to plan a public demonstration to highlight the union's grievances. Sinclair, his wife and Mrs Laura Cannon, wife of an organizer of the United Mine workers on duty in the Colorado strike district, went to John D. Rockefeller Jr's New York office and demanded to see the young millionaire. It was his refusal even to see Sinclair and his small delegation that prompted Sinclair's decision to organize a picket. The picket lines would be drawn outside the offices of the Standard Oil Company at 28 Broadway. Sinclair announced his strategy at a meeting of the Liberal Club in Macdougall Street. The New York Times reported that Sinclair had declared during the meeting he had felt an overwhelming temptation 'to publicly horsewhip Mr Rockefeller'.<sup>3</sup> However he was quick to temper his outrage and stressed to his fellow picketers that the demonstration was to be orderly and peaceful. He also requested that no literature be disseminated and decided they would not display placards. The meeting almost immediately fractured into two distinct factions. A union activist, Frederick Sumner Boyd, who had gained notoriety as a riot leader during the strike at the Paterson Works, led one faction which believed arms and ammunition would be the most effective means of convincing Rockefeller. Boyd advocated setting up a recruiting office and sending all the arms and ammunition that could be purchased

to Colorado.

Sinclair and his adherents soon banished the Boyd faction to another room, he referred to as 'the violent ward'. The meeting discussed all aspects of the demonstration and decided to plan a more nationally-orientated campaign. They envisaged pickets being established at Standard Oil Offices throughout the country. At the conclusion of the meeting, a resolution was passed which ended with the declaration that 'the time has come when American people must find some way to make clear their determination that the organized murdering of strikers by mine thugs and gunmen must cease'.<sup>4</sup>

The following morning Sinclair and a large crowd gathered outside the Standard Oil Offices. Some had attended the meeting the previous evening while many more had been convinced by Sinclair's arguments in The New York Times. Sinclair's presence and his request for passive, orderly protest ensured that any threat of disorder quickly disappeared. Although completely peaceful, the police moved in almost immediately and arrested Sinclair and four women who had been marching silently in front of the large crowd. Sinclair and his fellow marchers were taken into custody and remanded in the 'tombs'. They were later released on their own recognizance and were ordered to appear in court the following day and face charges of disturbing the peace. In the courtroom, Sinclair conducted his own defence. Despite his eloquent and impassioned plea, he and his supporters were found guilty and fined \$300 each. When they refused to pay they were sentenced to three days in prison. While Sinclair languished in prison, his wife continued to march and maintain the momentum of the

protest. Thousands of people gathered daily outside the offices to view the protest and to offer support for the cause.

The demonstration became a rallying point for disen-  
chanted radicals, anarchists, militant unionists and  
'Wobblies'. These groups radicalized the protest and began  
establishing pickets outside Rockefeller's home on West 54th  
Street and at the family estate, Pocantis Hills in North  
Tarrytown. 'The Rockefeller War' as the press labelled the  
dispute, began to spread to other areas as the radicals began  
planning multiple attacks against Rockefeller. Whereas the  
more radical elements of the Colorado protest planned to attack  
the person of Rockefeller, Sinclair was more interested in  
attacking him as a symbol of 'corporate oppression'. Sinclair  
had shifted his emphasis for attacking the person of Rockefeller  
claiming instead that the real villains were the Wall Street  
magnates who were prepared to use him as a spokesman. Rocke-  
feller commented in an interview that he was being subjected  
to unfair victimization.

To describe this condition as 'Rockefeller's War' as  
has been done by certain of the sensational news-  
papers and speakers is infamous. Our interest is  
solely in the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company, which  
is simply one of a large number of coal operating  
companies in Colorado.<sup>5</sup>

Despite Sinclair's new-found understanding for his  
position, the publicist in him knew that the name of Rocke-  
feller was newsworthy. By linking it with the Colorado dis-  
pute, Sinclair ensured widespread publicity for the miners'  
plight and gained a lever to force Rockefeller to redress the  
miners' grievances.

Throughout the growing dispute Sinclair remained con-  
vinced that a nationwide protest would be the most effective

way of publicizing his cause. He wanted pickets established at Standard Oil offices throughout the country. Sinclair sent out telegrams to leading socialists in major cities asking for their support and suggesting they establish picket lines of silent mourners wearing arm bands of black crepe. Sinclair confidently predicted he could 'demonstrate that the socialist protest against conditions in the Rockefeller mines in Colorado was nationwide'.<sup>6</sup> Sinclair then sent a telegram to Walter Lenspenick, National Secretary of the Socialist Party in Chicago, in which he said,

Cannot the Socialist Party initiate a movement in aid of the Colorado Strikers to bring home to the masters of Standard Oil the intense abhorrence with which American people regard their crime? Scores of telegrams have reached suggesting the picketing of branches of Standard Oil in every town. Cannot you or the National Executive Committee recommend that mourning pickets appear before their offices. Cannot all socialists locals put crepe before their door?<sup>7</sup>

Despite appeals from Sinclair for a nationwide show of socialist solidarity the Party executive seemed unwilling to support his call. The New York Times asked Julius Gerber, secretary of the Socialist Party if socialists would fall in with Sinclair's plans to picket all Standard Oil branch offices. 'Decidedly they will not', Gerber told the reporter.<sup>8</sup> He continued:

The socialists are decidedly tired of this cheap 'clap trap' of Sinclair's. They know it is the quiet work of organizing that counts and never this self-advertising noise. Sinclair's noise is his own personally-organized affair, and we have nothing to do with it. The socialists throughout the country can be counted on to view the Sinclair noise in the same spirit of deep disgust displayed by socialists in New York.<sup>9</sup>

If there was any doubt to this being a rebuff from the socialist hierarchy then the official reply from the executive

committee leaves no doubt. The committee believed that:

Mere bitter resentment or hostile demonstration against certain individuals will obscure the real issue. Nothing at this time could better serve the purpose of the reactionaries than to have the real issue of capitulation obscured by some violent outburst of resentment against individuals which would give the authorities a picket for drastic measures of repression throughout the country.<sup>10</sup>

Sinclair's official rebuff illustrates clearly one of his major problems in being accepted by the socialist movement. During this period he was too radical to be accepted by the party. The conservatism of the membership and administration dictated that the 'Rockefeller demonstration' would have to be disassociated from the party. The easiest way to achieve this was by stigmatizing Sinclair as a 'publicity seeker'. It was not lost on the socialist administration that by 1913 Sinclair was 'persona non grata' to many newspapers. Anything coming from him was in fact 'enough to condemn'. The label 'self-seeker', applied to Sinclair during these years, was one which never left him throughout his long career. As a consequence of this association the Socialist Party viewed Sinclair as detrimental to their aims and future.

With Sinclair's plans of a socialist co-ordinated national demonstration blocked, he decided to go to Colorado and investigate the conditions personally. He also planned to write a novel in a similar vein to The Jungle. Sinclair's wife remained in New York maintaining her vigil outside the offices at 26 Broadway. Arriving in Denver on 12 May 1914, Sinclair set about delivering speeches and organizing forces in Colorado. While he was meeting with strikers and union officials a conflict was rapidly developing between the Federal and State governments. Federal authorities were demanding the

recall of troops which had been keeping the peace since the strike had begun. Angered by the State legislature's apparent inactivity, President Wilson demanded that something be done and that State militia forces be used to maintain order. Sinclair entered the argument by charging that Governor Ammons had deliberately ignored Wilson's demands and had allowed the State legislature to dissolve without settling the dispute. Sinclair sent Wilson a number of telegrams declaring Ammons to be withholding information from the Federal authorities and claiming that Ammons was in the pocket of the mine operators. Sinclair charged in the Denver Post that Ammons' handling of the entire affair had been inept and corrupt. He clamoured for an investigation and although it was eventually started it was to prove to be merely an empty and redundant gesture.

Sinclair also believed the conspiracy was being further aided by the Denver Bureau of the Associated Press. This Bureau had refused to carry any of Sinclair's articles and had printed what were later proved to be totally fabricated reports. Sinclair went so far as to suggest that mine operators had control of the state government and the associated press. These sources had joined to oppress the wage slaves of Colorado. Sinclair wrote later:

The directors and managers of the Associated Press were as directly responsible for the subsequent starvation of these thousands of Colorado mine slaves as if they had taken them and strangled them with their naked fingers.<sup>11</sup>

Sinclair stayed in Colorado for some time after his attack on Governor Ammons, but the attitude of the Governor, the adjourned legislature, the determination of Rockefeller



and the inability to picket meant the strike was doomed. Although the union did not officially admit defeat until 10 December 1914, the strike for all intents and purposes was over several months previously.

Whether the socialist hierarchy's prophecies of oppression resulting from Sinclair's campaign ever came about is very hard to gauge. In later years he believed that his Ludlow Massacre campaign caused an enormous change in Rockefeller's attitude to industrial reform. Although Sinclair viewed it as one of his proudest moments it is not easy to overlook the attitude of the Socialist Party. The events of 1913 and 1914 caused the Socialist Party to look closely at the value of counting Sinclair among the membership of their movement. Sinclair, although remaining true to the socialist ideas, never again held the position he had done within the ranks of the party.

Like so many of Sinclair's other causes he decided one of the best ways to publicize it was to write a novel. While in Colorado Sinclair gathered information. During his research he travelled extensively throughout the strike zone, an experience that became the basis for King Coal and the yet unpublished Coal War. The importance of King Coal is twofold. Firstly, it is his first real work after The Jungle to 'indicate his full power as a novelist of the social scene'.<sup>12</sup> The large and extensive documentation is present but it is successfully inundated and becomes 'an essential part of the story'.<sup>13</sup> The second feature of the novel is that it comes at a time when Sinclair's reputation as a loyal socialist was most under threat. The war and his resignation from the party

'hot on the heels' of 'Ludlow' rebuff placed him in a very vulnerable position. Although still expounding socialist doctrines, he was in fact not accepted by the party and certainly not welcomed by the forces he had laboured so long to educate.

In King Coal Sinclair pursues his familiar theme of 'well-off-society-kid' who is gradually converted to socialism and sets about to use his wealth and position to do something to alleviate the suffering of workers. In this case his protagonist is Hal Warner, a university student and son of a mine operator. Hal decides to put his 'sociology' into action and goes to work in one of the closed Colorado mining camps during his summer holidays. There he encounters the brutality and inhumanity of the miners' conditions and that of the GFC (General Fuel Company). Hal meets and befriends many of the miners. Some are socialists but most have been dehumanized by the oppressive forces of the operators. He also meets Olsen, a union organizer, who in disguise is trying to establish a branch of the United Mine Workers' Union. Hal rues the uselessness and cowardice of workers, but Olsen teaches him to have faith,

To his mind the path was clear and straight. They must be taught the lesson of solidarity. As individuals they're helpless in the power of great corporations, but if they stand together, if they sell their labour as a unit - then they really count for something.<sup>14</sup>

Hal's transformation is completed when he is imprisoned after being 'framed' by the camp marshall. The explanation for Hal's newfound radicalization can be found in the direction of Sinclair's own life. While languishing in jail Hal reflects on the conditions in the mining camps:

And in this change though Hal had no idea of it, he was repeating an experience common among reformers; many of whom begin as mild and benevolent advocates of some piece of obvious injustice and under the operation of jail-psychology are made into blazing and determined revolutionaries.<sup>15</sup>

After Hal's imprisonment he is about to be 'sent down the mountain' when a mine disaster occurs. The company refuses to reopen the mine or rescue those entombed. Hal is forced to make a plea to his university friend Peter Harigan whose father owns the mine. When the mine is finally reopened Hal becomes involved in a strike which eventually breaks the union yet unifies the workers and illustrates to them what can be achieved.

The short months Hal spends in Colorado change him for the rest of his life,

He had gone into the adventure, preparing to find things that would shock him, he had known that somewhere, somehow he would have to fight the 'system'. But he never expected to find himself in the thick of a class war, leading a charge upon the trenches of his own associates. Nor was this the end, he knew, this war would not be settled by the winning of a trench lying here in the darkness and silence. Hal was realising what he had got himself in for. To employ another simile, he was a man who begins a brief flirtation on the street and wakes up next morning married.<sup>16</sup>

The 'new' Hal is in many ways the old Sinclair. Hal in the closing chapters of the novel, comes upon an old friend from the mine. He has been severely beaten by mine guards. It so angers Hal that he decides that it is time for reform:

He would begin a political fight to put an end to coal-company rule in this community. He would find someone to write up these conditions - he would ruin the money and publish a paper to make them known! Before this surging wrath had spent itself Hal Warner had actually come out as candidate for Governor and was turning the republican machine - all because an unidentified coal company detective had knocked a clay-faced old miner into the gutter and broken his arm'.<sup>17</sup>

The novel ends prophetically with Hal's best friend in the camp, a strong-willed Irish girl called Mary, begging him to stay. 'I'm going home for a while', he answered, 'but you can be sure that no matter what happens in my life I am going to fight for working people'.<sup>18</sup> Both the character and his executor lived their respective lives with this promise firmly rooted in their minds.

Sinclair in his autobiography claimed that throughout his career he never had one claim in his novels disproved. This was despite the fact that one publisher had described The Brass Check as having a thousand libels. King Coal, although not suffering the attacks to which The Jungle had been subjected, was open to debate concerning the truth of its factual content. Sinclair contended that King Coal was an accurate picture of conditions and events observed during his three week visit to the Colorado Coal fields. All the characters in the novel were supposedly based upon real people and every incident that has social significance was not only true, but typical. Sinclair referred, in a postscript to King Coal, to a number of sources which he believed substantiated his claims in the novel. Firstly he noted the Congressional Committee report, which followed the testimony given before the United States Commission on industrial relations. He coupled this with evidence unearthed by a committee appointed by the Governor of Colorado. Sinclair also made a detailed study of two independent reports prepared by representatives of two ecumenical organizations. In addition to these varied sources Sinclair had scoured the 1914 issues and files of a number of magazines which had closely followed the dispute.

All these sources pointed towards the picture portrayed by King Coal as being accurate. But Sinclair discovered a piece of evidence that usurped all his other material. While the novel was in publication, he unearthed a document that conclusively proved his claims. It was a decision rendered by the Supreme Court of Colorado which, by virtue of its status, subjugated all other sources.

The case contained many of the fundamental issues raised in King Coal and as Sinclair later boasted 'not often does a contemporary writer have the truth of his work verified and established in this manner'.<sup>19</sup> One of the main themes of King Coal is the mine operator's control of every facet of the miners' lives. The real life reality of this control was vividly illustrated and documented in Farr versus United States Supreme Court. The case involved a disputed election in November 1914 in Huepano County, Colorado. J.B. Farr the incumbent Sheriff, running on the Republican ticket, won the election by 329 votes. It was later noted that Farr was known throughout the coal country as the 'King of Huepano County'. After the election his 'Democrat' rival publicly contested the result before the district court, claiming that Farr was guilty of malconduct. The court upheld the election night result. A subsequent appeal was heard and won before the Colorado State Supreme Court. In the decision handed down, the court found all of the charges against Farr to be substantiated and overturned the election night result. Sinclair believed that the 'Farr' case reaffirmed the accuracy of his novel ensuring that King Coal would withstand the test of time.

He was unable to write King Coal until several months

after his return from the coal fields. This was mainly due to his commitments with editing his anthology, Cry for Justice. When he finally began writing his novel it was with the speed and literary fecundity that characterized his career. He sent a partly completed manuscript to the United Mine Workers' Union which proved to be one of the few organizations that actually approved of the novel. The only acceptance Sinclair initially received was from Frank Harris of Pearsons (15 November 1915) and Misha Appelbaum of The Humanitarian (6 January 1916). The lack of response prompted Sinclair to rewrite a synopsis he had prepared and had his new version reprinted. On 7 December George P. Brett of Macmillan's made a tentative acceptance with the proviso that Sinclair remember that he was writing a novel not 'a work of history or controversy'.<sup>20</sup>

Sinclair released the second half of the novel in May 1916. Brett refused to print the novel because he found the final chapters full of propaganda. Brett's rejection so discouraged Sinclair that he decided to completely abandon the novel. It was only the intervention and support of his wife that kept the project afloat. She wrote to Brett and urged him to support her husband. With Brett's encouragement and the tireless efforts of his wife, Sinclair finished the novel in November 1916. George Bernard Shaw and George Brandes agreed to write an introduction to the novel. Macmillan delayed publication of the novel because of the war and it was not until September 1917 that the first editions began to appear.

Despite the authenticated material, the sanction of the United Mine Workers' Union and the prestige of having an intro-

duction written by two respected writers, the novel did not sell well. A number of reasons appear to be responsible. Firstly the novel contained a number of intrinsic weaknesses in style and a tendency to over-indulge in socialist rhetoric. Another reason was possibly the staleness of the subject matter. By 1917 the strike had been over for two years and the impact of Sinclair's 'Ludlow Massacre' campaign had been greatly dissipated. This coupled with the war meant the conditions and abuses in the Colorado coalfields were relegated to the background. All these factors added to the book's poor sales. In November 1917 another Macmillan executive, Edward Marsh, rejected the sequel to King Coal. The Coal War, as it had been tentatively titled, is still unpublished and the whereabouts of the original manuscript is unknown.

## THE LUDLOW MASSACRE CAMPAIGN

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Colorado Quarterly, Vol.21, 1972, p.58.
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P. West, who wrote the official report on the Colorado  
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Relations.
- 3 New York Times, 29 April 1914, p.5:2.
- 4 IBID, New York Times, p.5:2.
- 5 Quoted Graham, p.60. Interview with Rockefeller after  
his retreat to the family estate in North Tarrytown.
- 6 New York Times, 10 May 1914, p.14:3.
- 7 IBID, p.14:3.
- 8 IBID, p.14:3.
- 9 IBID, p.14:3.
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- 15 IBID, p.143.
- 16 IBID, p.257.
- 17 IBID, p.376.
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## CHAPTER VI

## JIMMIE HIGGENS GOES TO WAR

'Mr Sinclair begins by saying that because of the adoption by his party of the "majority report" denouncing the war, he finds himself after sixteen years of membership and energetic work in the party "so far out of agreement with it" that he cannot continue his affiliation. Mr Sinclair recites that during the whole period of his membership in the Socialist Party he was an agitator against war and that nine years ago with Charles Edward Russell he issued a manifesto calling upon socialists of all countries to oppose war by adopting a program of insurrection and general strike either to prevent a declaration of war or break the back of the war after it was begun.

New York Times, 18 July 1917.

During the first World War there was a residue of bitterness within the Socialist Party toward those who disagreed with established party policy. The most prominent of these dissenters was Upton Sinclair. He had decided to resign publicly from the party when he was no longer able to reconcile his support for the war with the party's aims. On 17 July 1917 The New York Times announced his resignation.

In his resignation letter to members of his local branch Sinclair stressed that the move was not a betrayal of the socialist movement. He was not realigning himself with the forces of capitalism but merely following a course of action which, he believed, would eventually benefit the radical movement. He saw the need to influence the peace settlement to ensure that the old imperialistic Europe would not be restored. This pragmatic rather than ideological assessment of the war greatly influenced Sinclair's decision.

Above all, Sinclair's concern was German militarism. The German military machine, while in existence and powerful, would make large-scale revolution difficult to implement. In 1914, three years before his resignation, he had voiced his fears in a letter to the Anti-Establishment League. In this correspondence Sinclair expressed the conflicting loyalties that many committed socialists felt between their party and their consciences. In many ways this was more acute for Sinclair. In the letter he stated:

I know that you are brave and unselfish people making sacrifices for a great principle ... but I cannot join you ... I believe in the present effort which the allies are making to suppress German militarism ... I would approve of America going to their assistance. I would enlist to that end, if ever there be a situation where I believe I could do more with my hand than I could with my pen ... I doubt if there is anyone in America who hates militarism more deeply and instinctly than I do ... [but] I believe it is a work of civilization the allies are doing ...

You will see from this that I am not a consistent non-resister, only a person requiring a tremendous lot to make him fight ... this attitude on my part will continue until the last German has been driven back from the soil of France, Belgium and Russia. Then I should favour peace and oppose war'.<sup>1</sup>

After his resignation, Sinclair was subjected to ridicule and abuse by some of the party faithful. This, however, did not deter him from remaining friendly with all those who were willing to accept and understand his decision. After his old friend Eugene V. Debs was imprisoned for making treasonable statements, Sinclair continued to correspond with him and sent him books and writing materials. He worked tirelessly to gain him a Presidential pardon, finally succeeding in 1923. In October 1918 The New York Times reported that Sinclair and his second wife had started a movement to obtain signatures to petition to President Wilson for pardon of

persons in jail under charges of violating the laws forbidding propaganda against the war and the army draft. Also when other radicals left the country to avoid conscription, Sinclair sent them money and actively campaigned on their behalf.

Despite these sincere gestures, radicals generally regarded his defection as a total betrayal. The distrust that Sinclair's resignation engendered had its roots deep in his Ludlow Massacre campaign when he had called for the Socialist Party to support his silent mourning<sup>2</sup> demonstration. The rebuff he received was more than a mere conservative reaction against an agitator. During the war, this bitterness was made apparent to Sinclair when his attempts to establish an independent magazine met with opposition. While trying to build up a subscription list, he asked for the membership lists of several socialist and liberal groups he had either formed or aided in previous years. His requests met with evasion and refusal. The concensus of opinion among the varied groups was to treat Sinclair as a traitor. As one old socialist wrote:

I do not care to be personally associated with you in any way. You are a renegade from the socialist movement, a deserter in the face of the enemy, deserting in a crucial time in the battle, when, if ever in the history of the movement we needed the support of all our troops: you go in my mind with Judas Iscariot and Benedict Arnold.<sup>3</sup>

This was the burden Sinclair carried throughout the war. Yet despite the pressure from his former socialist allies he continued to support President Wilson. He sent Wilson numerous letters, full of suggestions, advice and support. Wilson acknowledged many of them personally, often admitted the feasibility of his suggestions but rarely implementing any of them. Sinclair also had to endure attacks from his fellow

muckrakers. His main concern was always winning the war and establishing 'an enduring and socially just peace' but even this desire was open to scorn. Charles Edward Russel chastised Sinclair for writing about a 'clean peace and furtherance of social justice after the war', declaring:

... It is utterly fatuous now to be discussing terms of peace when we are confronted with the destruction of democracy ... and there is nothing else worth talking of thinking about for my part ... I think you might be in a better business.<sup>4</sup>

Although labelled and identified as a 'turncoat jingo'<sup>5</sup> by the radical left, Sinclair was not exactly welcomed with open arms by the wartime administration. Nor did he endear himself to them when he embarked on a campaign to pardon anti-war prisoners after the signing of the Armistice, and redoubted his efforts to free Debs and the socialist millionaire Rose Pastor Stokes.

Throughout the war, Sinclair consistently fought for a policy which would benefit both the Allies and the Russian people. In letters to fellow socialists both in America and in Russia he cautioned against a separate peace settlement between Russia and Germany. In addition to his constant warnings, he made a number of extremely accurate predictions and prophecies many of which were ridiculed or ignored. In 1915, for example, Sinclair warned against 'implementing terms so humiliating as to leave a permanent sense of wrong'. This warning generally went unheeded and Sinclair's disillusionment with the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 was one of the main reasons for his new direction in the twenties.

The varied response to Sinclair during World War I is a microcosmic reflection of his career. Despite his sincere

attempt, he remained in a kind of literary and ideological limbo. The view of extreme socialists, such as the Austrian Otto Fleishman, who viewed Sinclair as merely anti-German was held by a number of Americans during the war. According to this theory Sinclair's defection from the Socialist Party, his support for American participation in the war and pleas for the Russians not to make a separate peace all pointed towards this anti-German feeling. This misrepresentation of Sinclair's attempts to bring about a just peace followed by socialist revolution as if they were merely hatred of Germans is typical of the difficulty he faced in getting his views across throughout his career.

Sinclair was thus rejected throughout the war by radicals who viewed him as a traitor. With equal conviction the Wilson Administration and its supporters viewed Sinclair with suspicion and distrust. He walked a political tight-rope throughout the war. It was one in which reaching the end would do nothing to improve his predicament. Although he rejoined the Socialist Party in the early twenties, he never regained his former role as its chief spokesman. He would always be too moderate for the changing face of the American-Left. By the same token he would become too radical for the reactionary twenties. Sinclair's rejection by the left after the war was indirectly predicted by Lenin in 1915, who said of him, 'he is an emotional socialist without theoretica-grounding'.<sup>6</sup> If Sinclair had been motivated by his doctrine rather than his emotions he might well have come to his later realisation much earlier.

Sinclair did change his stance, a change seen in the

last chapters of Jimmie Higgins and his next work 100% The Story of a Patriot. However, this change came too late. The split in Socialist Party and the rise, if temporary, of a distinctive Communist Party banished Sinclair effectively from the forefront of the radical movement. He became in the twenties 'an independent critic of capitalism'. Yet despite the regret he felt over his resignation it did not stop him from resigning again in 1934, when he joined the Democratic Party and ran for Governor of California. In the words Winston Churchill used to describe himself 'he not only rattled but berattled'.<sup>7</sup>

Sinclair's major output during the later stages of the war was a novel Jimmie Higgins. It began as a sincere attempt to represent the 'pro-war' socialist viewpoint, but was transformed during the writing.

Jimmie Higgins<sup>8</sup> published in 1919 is one of Sinclair's lesser known and more lightly regarded novels. The plot is contrived and characterization of the protagonist, Jimmie Higgins, is often one-dimensional and poorly developed. Yet despite its literary faults, the novel is historically an important document, reflecting Sinclair's changing status in the American political scene and radical movement. Historical factors also determined the content and theme of the novel. Thematically, the novel traces the dilemma facing all American socialists during the war and chronicles Sinclair's changing attitude to United States' involvement in Europe.

The novel is also significant in that it clearly defines Sinclair's attitude towards being a socialist. Speaking through Jimmie, Sinclair comments that although Jimmie was

making twice what he had been before the war, he still continued working every night for the party, at meetings and canvassing on street corners. His wife, Lizzie, bemoans the fact that at last they had enough money to live comfortably, but instead of capitalizing on their golden opportunity, Jimmie seemed determined to destroy their chance. His explanation appears to be a summary of Sinclair's own life as a socialist:

Should a man think only of his own life and children and forget entirely other wives and children of the working class. That was why the workers had been slaves through the ages because each thought of himself, and never his fellows. No you must act as a class on the alert to seize every advantage to teach solidarity and stimulate class consciousness.<sup>9</sup>

Throughout his career, Sinclair remained an ardent socialist who consistently tried to prove his commitment by putting class consciousness before financial and social advancement. Writing in April 1917, in Pearsons Magazine, he refuted allegations that he had profited financially from socialism. He claimed once to have refused to permit the use of his name in connection with a modern meat-packing plant, a decision which cost him \$200,000 in stock. In another article, entitled The Price I Paid, Sinclair chronicles a list of offers which, if accepted, would have made him a wealthy man. These included a host of magazine, cinema and theatre offers to serialize or produce his works. Sinclair declined them all because they required him to compromise his socialist principles by removing or rewriting socialist passages.

By 1939, Sinclair could claim that he had never owned a car, not even a Ford<sup>10</sup> and his only means of transport was a bicycle. 'At the moment of writing', he claimed in the same

year:

My worldly goods consist of about ten dollars in the bank, a few clothes which are five or ten years old, a couple of hundred dollars worth of furniture which was purchased second hand and a few hundred books. Yet whenever I come out and raise a cry for the wage slaves of my country, I never fail to read about myself as an agitator for profit. Do you wonder that a radical worm sometimes feels like turning and biting?<sup>11</sup>

Sinclair's agitation at being labelled a profiteer<sup>12</sup> by the American public became even more evident after Jimmie Higgins. He maintained not only that he never made money out of socialism, but that he had forsaken his reputation as a man of letters in the service of socialism. Jimmie Higgins certainly did nothing to enhance that reputation.

The novel makes no claim to being other than a piece of propaganda. It was fashioned out of Sinclair's desire to express his disappointment over events in Europe and 'the soul of American's superior call over his loyalty to social justice'.<sup>13</sup> Sinclair had watched carefully the developing situation in Russia during the war years. Although originally welcoming the February Revolution, he was greatly disturbed by the events of the October Revolution. This disillusionment led Sinclair to publicly advocate Allied intervention in Russia. Writing in November 1918, in his newly formed magazine, he declared:

I have never advocated the dictatorship of the proletariat. I thought it a frightful blunder that the Soviets overthrew the constitutional assembly and I think the best thing the Allies can do is to constitutionally assemble to power and keep peace until there can be a representative election throughout Russia.<sup>14</sup>

These ideas which seemed so far removed from his early writings, were to prove to be only a temporary change in



direction. His advocacy of anti-revolutionary and anti-libertarian ideas would soon be regretted.

Sinclair was unable to devote his usual energy and thorough research to the Jimmie Higgins project. As a consequence, rather being a true muckraking novel, the completed work drew heavily upon his twenty year experience as a socialist. For once socialist propaganda took a back seat to Sinclair's advocacy of the war in Europe. Of equal significance is the novel's limited vision and imagination. He merely relates a simple story of the transformation of an avidly anti-war socialist into a pro-war socialist. As one writer has suggested, Jimmie Higgins is a socialist romance in which the author tries to show that no real American can remain a pacifist and withhold support for the war. So strong was Sinclair's conviction that he even muted his traditional criticism of capitalism and suggested that reforms were being instituted in wartime America.

He found that his defence of the war ostracized him from the leftist press. Deprived of an outlet for his material, he decided to publish his own magazine. In 1918 there appeared the first edition of Upton Sinclair's, subtitled, A Monthly Magazine for a Clean Peace and Internment. He published throughout 1918 and 1919 until it became financially impossible to continue. Exercising complete editorial control and being the sole contributor, except for some outside reports and correspondence, Sinclair turned the magazine into an effective mouthpiece for the 'pro-war socialist viewpoint'. The magazine at its height had a monthly circulation of 10,000. The experiment, deemed 'an adventure in personal journalism',

sought to reconcile the various forces pulling against Sinclair. Throughout the short lifespan of the magazine Sinclair appeared to be walking a precarious line between support of the President's war policy and support for his fellow radicals who were agitating for free speech and against militarism'.<sup>15</sup>

Through his magazine, Sinclair voiced the ambivalent attitudes many American radicals felt towards the war. These attitudes reappeared in Jimmie Higgins. Sinclair began serializing the novel in mid-1918. Monthly instalments also appeared in New Appeal and Appeal to Reason. While in serialization, events in Europe began to change Sinclair's perspective of the war and his attitude to it. This change prompted him to revise the final chapters. He had gradually been transforming Jimmie into a patriotic pro-war socialist and the climax of this transformation was to have been Jimmie's heroic death in France. However, after the Armistice and the disillusionment Sinclair felt over American intervention in Northern Russia, he extended Jimmie's lifespan and had him transferred to Russia.

In Russia, Jimmie observes at first hand the atrocities committed against the Bolsheviks. He is persuaded by an old man, who lives in a village close to the army base, to disseminate subversive literature amongst American soldiers. After being caught in possession of a number of leaflets Jimmie is imprisoned by the military police. While in custody he is tortured and beaten. Throughout his ordeal he refuses to divulge the source of the literature. After prolonged subjection to water torture, Jimmie goes hopelessly insane and

eventually dies. In this manner his end is no longer the death of a patriotic hero but the death of a socialist hero.

Sinclair had been gradually painting a sympathetic portrait of military involvement in France but in the additional chapters he builds a case asserting that Wilson had been poorly advised in his decision to intervene in Russia. Sinclair contends that Wilson was convinced that his actions were necessary to 'save the world from revolution'. By having Jimmie arrested and imprisoned in Russia he intended to show that the world was not yet safe for democracy and that corruption and cruelty did not only exist in military prisons. He was appealing to Wilson and the American public to wake up to the abuses of civil liberties that were being committed in the name of democracy in the United States and Russia.

Sinclair's obsession with the perversion of the power of government that emerged in this novel became a regular theme throughout the twenties and thirties. Christine Scriabine believes that this obsession was due to a paranoia that seemed to surface in all his writings. Sinclair had a habit of crediting his enemies with huge resources, capacities and energies. This fear, prompted him earlier in his career to blame the tragic destruction of his socialist community at Helicon Hall on the Steel Interests. With equal conviction he maintained throughout his career that he was the victim of an organized conspiracy of victimization by the press. He faithfully compiled a record of alleged incidents of censorship and prejudice. He eventually published them in The Brass Check (1918).

Although Jimmie Higgins indirectly publicized Sinclair's multitude of causes and helped to finance his next novel, its primary function was to put into perspective the war and its

relationship to the socialist movement. As already noted, the main character is a poor, simple machinist who lives in a small American industrial town. The name 'Jimmie Higgins' had been originally coined by the socialist Vice-Presidential candidate Ben Hanford, who used it to symbolize the grass-roots party member who carried out the tedious, unrecognized yet necessary work behind the scenes. Eugene Debs on reading the first instalment of Jimmie Higgins in Upton Sinclair's wrote to Sinclair and expressed his delight with a fictional likeness of the men who personified the socialist movement.

Debs wrote:

Jimmie Higgins is the chap who is always on the job, who does all the necessary work that no one else will do; who never grumbles, never finds fault, and is never discouraged. All he asks is the privilege of doing his best for the cause where it is most needed ... the pure joy it gives him to serve the cause is his only reward ... almost anyone can be the candidate and almost anyone will do for speaker, but it takes the rarest of qualities to produce a Jimmie Higgins.<sup>16</sup>

While Debs was enthusiastic about the portrayal, Sinclair himself had strong reasons for using the name in his title. In the serialized version the novel was titled Jimmie Higgins goes to War. In his autobiography, Sinclair explained why:

The title indicates what I believe to be the present opinion of the majority of Jimmy Higgins. Those Jimmie Higgins who have decided otherwise, I would say that I am making in story an honest attempt to give them a hearing - so far as the censor would permit.<sup>17</sup>

Sinclair's Jimmie Higgins faithfully recreates Hanford's and Debs' characterization. Having no real understanding of socialist doctrine and lacking any original ideas of his own, Jimmie absorbs those of his fellow members. With such a tabula rasa to work with Sinclair is able to air every attitude

and alternative to supporting the war through the very impressionable Jimmie, who runs the full gamut of these choices throughout the course of the novel.

He unwittingly becomes a funnel for German money to be used for anti-war campaigns. He then unsuccessfully organizes a strike in the machine shop where he works. After losing his job he begins work in a bicycle shop which turns out to be a base for German saboteurs. In all these episodes Sinclair shows Jimmie's naivety and the influence of German money on the anti-war campaign in the United States. These events begin the transformation of Jimmie's attitude to the war.

However, the key event which changes Jimmie's attitude and indeed changed many American socialists' perspective of the war was the German breaking of The Treaty of Brest Litovsk. Many radicals had held anti-war views on the strength of the huge German Socialist Party memberships. Many more Germans had emigrated to America and came to form the backbone of the Socialist Party. With the German invasion of Russia, the world's first socialist nation, American radicals watched aghast as German socialists fired on fellow socialists. Their sense of betrayal can be witnessed in their new pro-war stance.

Jimmie's own newly found support for the war suffers a temporary reversal when he discovers that Government forces had been used to break unions in factories, mines, and other places of production. He also frets over the treatment being meted out to conscientious objectors. His fears are quickly dispelled however when he becomes fully convinced that a German victory would herald the destruction of civilization. Jimmie's observation of the levelling efforts and democracy of

the army and his acceptance of pro-war arguments lead to his final indoctrination as a pro-war socialist.

Spurred on by his discovery of patriotism, Jimmie joins the army. With Jimmie in the army Sinclair launches into full-scale propaganda. As in The Jungle (where he rehashes a number of Chicago atrocities), so here he works in descriptions of German atrocities, for example the barbarism of submarine warfare and German fighting tactics. Sinclair even takes time to dispel myths about the aloofness of the English aristocracy by portraying their contribution to the Allied war effort. He did this by having Jimmie nursed back to health by an aristocratic volunteer nurse, after he is injured when his transport ship is sunk by a German 'U-boat'. All these various components add to the propaganda value of the work.

After completing the novel, Sinclair wrote to President Wilson, offering it to be 'used by the Government as a piece of propaganda for your ideals', and suggesting that it could be cheaply distributed to war workers. Although Sinclair was confident of selling the novel, he did experience some difficulty. His old adversary, George P. Brett of Macmillan found the book written 'not from the standpoint of the story as it should be but because of propaganda and other material with which the book is, in my opinion, overloaded'.<sup>18</sup>

Sinclair finally sold the book to Horace Liveright who published it at the end of May 1919. As already noted the announcement of the Armistice on 11 November, moved Sinclair to add the Russian episode to his novel. Although he feared it would be suppressed because of the anti-Bolshevik climate in the United States, his fears proved groundless. The novel

sold well, but its actual sales, however, were less important than the fact that it ended one phase in Sinclair's career and marked the opening of a new phase.

Like many pro-war socialists Sinclair felt a great feeling of betrayal over the war. He totally believed Wilson's assurances that 'this would be the last necessary battle for democracy'.<sup>19</sup> Just as Sinclair realised that the war was a means of re-establishing the status quo in America, Jimmie's experience after his enlistment, proved his mistake. Sinclair, while not actually enlisting himself, had tried to generate support for Wilson and the war effort. It was a decision he later felt had been the most ill-founded of his career. In 1928 he wrote:

... If at the beginning of 1917 I had known what I know today I would have opposed the war and gone to jail with the pacifist radicals ... I cannot forgive him [Wilson], it is not merely that he had made a fool of himself but had made a fool of me.<sup>20</sup>

Although written with the advantage of hindsight, Sinclair was rapidly coming to the conclusion, even during the war, that his support may have been misdirected. It was a conclusion being reached by many other patriotic socialists who were torn between loyalty to their country and loyalty to their ideology.

Sinclair had used the novel to vent his rage at a wide range of abuses and oppressive institutions he had encountered since his publication of The Jungle. It is a reaffirmation of his thesis that the evils of the world can be explained by the mechanics of capitalism and the forces that attempt to control and profit from mankind. In the opening pages of the novel

Jimmie meets a socialist presidential candidate who is obviously modelled on Eugene Debs. The candidate speaks at the Leeville local and during his speech he 'shows his rage was the rage of a tender-hearted poet, a lover of children and nature driven mad by the sight of torment wantonly inflicted'.<sup>21</sup> To Christian socialists like Debs and Sinclair they [the forces of capitalism], had 'plunged mankind into lunacy, they call it war but I call it murder'.<sup>22</sup> The candidate attacks the capitalist system which he believes is the basic motivation for warfare:

And what was the cause of the blackest of calamities? The speaker went on to show that the determining motive was not racial jealousy but commercial greed. The fountainhead of war was world capitalism clamouring for markets seeking to get rid of its surplus products to keep busy its hordes of wage slaves at home.<sup>23</sup>

Obviously towards the end of the war Sinclair had become increasingly disillusioned with both the war and the Wilson Administration. After the signing of the Peace Treaty in 1919 this feeling intensified. The combined effect of the Versailles debacle and American intervention in Russia served significantly to alter Sinclair's previously pro-war stance. With the advent of the Red Scare and the subsequent Palmer Raids<sup>24</sup> and the anti-radical fervour they engendered he abandoned support for the Wilson Administration. He also could perceive no further danger to American security which to his mind released him from his patriotic obligations. In 1920 Sinclair decided to explain his new position just as he had found the need to voice his pro-war stance in Jimmie Higgins. The outcome of this need was 100% The Story of the Patriot. The novel was written in six weeks and was published on 15



October 1920. Sinclair makes no mention of the work in his autobiography and very little in his correspondence.

The novel makes even fewer literary claims than Jimmie Higgins. It chronicles the change in Sinclair's attitude and its theme is pro-socialist and pro-radical. Christine Scriabine describes Peter Grudge, Sinclair's one dimensional protagonist, as the 'Jimmie Higgins of the whites engaged in spying and snooping upon the Jimmie Higgins' of the reds'.<sup>25</sup> The novel satirizes the labour union spy and illustrates the dropping of his defence of the American Government and returning to his more familiar role of critic.

The novel is virtually a complete reversal of his attitude in the early pages of Jimmie Higgins. As with all Sinclair's propagandist works, he manages to weave into a superficial narrative a range of divergent strands. These various strands are best described by Louis Uttermeyer who reviewed the novel in 1920:

100% is the whole evil catalogue of terrorism, a cumulative record of blackmail, espionage, intimidation, intrigue, unwarranted assaults, invasions, property destructions, paid witnesses, illegal jailings, horse whippings, lynchings, frame ups, patriotic murders, an orgy of confiscation, Bolshevik baiting, mad hysteria, mad fear and even madder frenzy.<sup>26</sup>

Sinclair's portrait of the 'professional patriot' is unpleasant and represents a continuation of the darker passages of Jimmie Higgins showing how the war propaganda machine deludes and destroys a working man.<sup>27</sup>

The destruction of the working man by the system is a theme Sinclair continued to work throughout this period. His principal output between 1917 and 1927 was a series of 'economic interpretations of American social influences - religious,

journalistic, educational and literary. Described as a 'semi-Marxist analysis of superstructure of capitalist culture' by the author<sup>28</sup>, they were exposes of capitalist corruption in every facet of American life. This series of pamphlets began in 1917 with the publication of The Profits of Religion.

Sinclair had long wanted to show that 'big business not only corrupted politics but every major social institution'.<sup>29</sup> In his correspondence he refers to the Dead Hand Series he was preparing. This series marked a return to a medium which suited Sinclair. Before his settlement in Pasadena in 1915, his life had been dominated by a search for health, peace and a permanent base. The stability this offered Sinclair allowed him to settle down 'to the kind of work which had enduring claims on his mind and were well suited to his talents as a morally outraged, historically minded journalist in the service of a cause'.<sup>30</sup>

The Dead Hand Series, which comprises The Profits of Religion, The Brass Check, The Goosestep, The Gosling, Mammon-art and Money Writes, demonstrates Sinclair's strength in gathering, selecting and presenting fact, and the weakness of his popular materialist standpoint in interpreting fact'. Many critics have been quick to point out however that the works have been hamstrung by Sinclair's poor sense of proportion. Trivial incidents, often gleaned from Sinclair's own experience, were given equal standing with scandals of national importance. The multitude of factual information contained in these works often becomes overwhelming and obscures the reason for their inclusion, blurring the clear understanding of his original thesis. Despite these faults, however, they remain a perfect example of the muckraking genre and are lasting store-

houses of valuable information.

In late 1917 Sinclair had first mooted the idea of investigating organized religion. The first reference to this was in a letter written to the editor of the radical publication Menace. In it Sinclair referred to a 20,000 word article he had been writing on the Catholic Church. On 19 November 1917 Sinclair wrote to the editor of another radical periodical, The Truthseeker. He claimed to have finished a novel of 65,000 words which he had entitled The Bootstrap Lifters. He explained to his correspondent that his manuscript was an essay in the economic interpretation of religion.

The response Sinclair received from both journals was tepid and offered little encouragement. He had just resigned from the Socialist Party and was engaged in lengthy negotiations with Doubleday Page to buy the rights of six of his earlier novels. At the same time he was attempting to have The Jungle made into a film and to purchase the printing plates of Cry for Justice, an early anthology of radical writing he had compiled. Within these legal entanglements Sinclair was also attempting to establish his own magazine.

Sinclair decided to serialize his newly completed manuscript in his magazine. The Profits of Religion appeared in five instalments between April and September 1918. With the minor success of Upton Sinclair's magazine and the bad experiences he had had with various publishing houses, Sinclair was prompted to become his own publisher. His first project was the publication of The Profits of Religion in book form.

He printed a total of 23,000 copies and it proved to be moderately successful.

Between the release of The Profits of Religion and his second pamphlet, The Brass Check, Sinclair decided to amalgamate his magazine with Emanuel Halderman-Julius's Appeal to Reason. Renamed the Halderman-Julius Weekly the magazine contained an 'Upton Sinclair page'. It was on this page that he began serializing Jimmie Higgins and later announced that he was preparing an investigation of journalism. Tentatively entitled A Glimpse of Journalism through an editor's eye, the first instalments began appearing in the early spring of 1919.

Sinclair had been collecting information for an investigation into journalism for many years. However, it was not until 1919 that he was able to begin editing his voluminous material. The outcome of this work was The Brass Check, the most famous and successful of the pamphlets. Sinclair tried to show how the major newspapers were biased in this presentation of news. It was his contention that the press erected a concrete wall against his news 'which effectively censored radical news and ensured that the moneyed interests would not be publicly harmed. Writing some years later, Sinclair argued that The Brass Check was:

... a book of facts that no one could dispute because I had saved the clippings and I verified every story that I told 31

Sinclair showed his completed manuscript to a corporation lawyer, Samuel Uttermeyer, who told Sinclair that it contained at least twenty corporate libels and a thousand civil suits. Another longtime friend of Sinclair, Gaylord Wiltshire, predicted that it would be suppressed. Despite

these warnings Sinclair did release the novel and the predicted legal proceedings never eventuated.

The Brass Check was also notable for the fact that it was printed on Kraft or brown wrapping paper. Due to the paper shortage caused by wartime restrictions, Sinclair was forced to look for alternative sources. Equally short were funds for this project. Sinclair eventually borrowed \$6,000 from Samuel Uttermeyer. With this loan he bought a carload of Kraft paper. He initially printed 25,000 copies which proved to be popular. By mid 1920 the work had become so popular that it was in its eighth printing and over 144,000 copies were in circulation. Sinclair took the unusual step of not copyrighting the novel. He believed that information contained within the pages of The Brass Check was so important that it was necessary to encourage its circulation as far as possible.

In recent years some scholars have begun to reevaluate The Brass Check. Judson Grenier, for example, published an article in 1972 in The Journalism Quarterly in which he described the work as 'belately honoured' and 'important to us historically as a catalyst for reform'.<sup>32</sup> Grenier argues that modern journalistic reformers could learn much from Sinclair's analysis of the early twentieth century. Despite the flaws of the work Grenier believes The Brass Check gives a number of valid and abject lessons to achieve these reforms.

A telling illustration of the impact of The Brass Check was Grenier's story of his meeting with Sinclair in 1965. During the course of that meeting Grenier mentioned The Brass Check. Sinclair responded by showing Grenier a trophy which

had been presented to him by the New York Chapter of the American Newspaper Guild. The inscription read:

Page One Award in Letters to Upton Sinclair, author of hundreds of books and papers, including The Jungle and The Brass Check, over a span of 60 years. All of which contributed immeasurably to the advancement of democracy and pure enlightenment.

33

It was not until 1923, that the third pamphlet in the 'Dead Hand' series appeared. The Goosestep was a 488 page analysis of the American university system and the inadequacies inherent in these institutions. In the same year Sinclair published The Goslings, a continuation of his investigation into the education system. The Goslings sought to expose the subtle indoctrination of students in preparation for predestined positions in society. Of the two The Goslings is far superior and ranks with The Brass Check as the best of the series.

The last two pamphlets in the series dealt with Sinclair's interpretation of the 'state of the arts'. The first of these was Mammonart written in 1925. The importance of Mammonart lies not in its contribution to literature but in its expression of Sinclair's attitude to the rapidly changing literary climate of the twenties. Previously, his pamphlets had dealt specifically with the American scene. Mammonart differed in that it included the whole of world literature. Freeman,<sup>34</sup> one contemporary writer, described the work as 'less an exposé of facts than an exposition of opinion, a passionate polemic against the theory of art for art's sake; a frank defence of 'propaganda art'.<sup>35</sup> Freeman contended that Mammonart was a defence of Sinclair's career and the 'form' he had chosen, to criticize capitalist society.

At a time when many writers were embracing communist ideology and Soviet literature, Sinclair's work showed no traces of these influences. His prime concern was always to illuminate the industrial and social conflicts of the times in a quest to establish his vision of social justice. In this task, Sinclair was increasingly dogged by the,

... stone wall of Bourgeoise literary criticism which maintained that art was a sacred realm above the vulgar conflicts of society, a refuge from the materialism of everyday life, a beautiful exquisite fragile spirit concerned not with time but with eternity. Literature which dealt with the realities of industrial America - The Jungle, let us say, or The Iron Heel - was dismissed as propaganda when Sinclair tried to arouse sympathy for the struggling poet in The Journal of Arthur Stirling, that was art; when he tried to arouse sympathy for the struggling proletariat as in King Coal, that was propaganda.<sup>36</sup>

There is little doubt that Sinclair's 'dead hand series' was barely concealed propaganda. The series represented a continuation of his search for social justice and an alleviation of society's problems. The series also clearly illustrated that Sinclair continued to be out of the mainstream of 1920s literature and remained a curious symbol of an age that had long passed. Eugene Debs' socialism was bred in the same age. He and Sinclair entered the twenties politically outdated and irreconcilably detached from the radical movement. Debs' identification with Sinclair's dilemma is shown by his evaluation of Mammonart:

It is a wonderful book, he wrote to Sinclair, and must be eye opening to many of the artists, writers and others who serve the leisure class, in everything they do but indignantly resent the idea that there is any propaganda in their work ... I would like an inscribed copy of Mammonart simply with your name in it in your hand for my collections of immortals.<sup>37</sup>

The final instalment in the series appeared two years

later in 1927 and ushered out a decade in which Sinclair had failed to recapture the artistic quality of The Jungle and King Coal. Money Writes the sixth and final pamphlet in the dead hand series appeared only months before the publication of Oil. If Money Writes ended a decade in the literary wilderness then, Oil definitely heralded, if only temporarily, a return to literary acceptance and respect.



## JIMMIE HIGGENS GOES TO WAR

- 1 Harris, Rebel, p.161.
- 2 see Chapter on Ludlow Massacre.
- 3 Leon Harris, Upton Sinclair: American Rebel (New York, Cromwell, 1975), p.162.
- 4 IBID, p.162.
- 5 IBID, p.162.
- 6 IBID, p.163.
- 7 IBID, p.165.
- 8 Jimmie Higgens is a name coined by a Socialist Presidential candidate in 1906. Jimmie Higgens was the person who always was on the job, who does all the work that no one else will do and is the backbone of any socialist 'local'.
- 9 Sinclair, Jimmie Higgens (Liveright, 1919), p.57.
- 10 Sinclair later wrote a novel which was a biography of Henry Ford. The Fliver King brutally attacks big business and the Ford myth.
- 11 Sinclair, Telling the World (T. Werner Laurie Ltd., London 1939), p.94.
- 12 Mike Williams 'one of the most influential lay catholics during the early part of the twentieth century once wrote to Sinclair and attacked him as the 'Prophet for profit'.
- 13 Christine B. Scriabine, Upton Sinclair: Witness to History Brown University 1973, Ph.D. thesis, p.137.
- 14 Sinclair, The Problem of Russia, Upton Sinclair's November 1918, p.5.
- 15 William Bloodworthy Jr., Upton Sinclair (Boston Twayne 1977) p.94.
- 16 On reading the first instalment of Jimmie Higgens in Upton Sinclair's Eugene V. Debs wrote to Sinclair and expressed delight with the fictional likeness of the men who personified the Socialist Movement.
- 17 Gottesman, Annotated Bibliographical Catalogue, p.165.
- 18 Harris, American Rebel, p.173.

- 19 Jonathon A. Yoder, Upton Sinclair (New York, Ungar 1975) p.63.
- 20 IBID, p.63.
- 21 Sinclair, Jimmie Higgens, p.20.
- 22 IBID, p.20.
- 23 IBID, p.21.
- 24 During the early twenties the United States went through a period commonly called the Red Scare. The 'Scare' was fueled by a number of factors but had its origins in the fear surrounding the Russian Revolution. Many already xenophobic about the heavy Asian and European immigration and alarmed at the rise of anarchist violence was ready to believe rumours of communist infiltration. The Attorney General of the time, Palmer, carried out a number of police raids on so-called communist subversive and anarchist groups. Newly arrived immigrants were particularly vulnerable. Thousands of innocent people were rounded up, arrested and imprisoned.
- 25 Scriabine, Witness to History, p.234.
- 26 Gottesman, Annotated Bibliographical Catalogue, p.175.
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- 28 Obituaries from the Times, p. 946
- 29 Gottesman, p. 157
- 30 IBID, p.157
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- 33 Grenier, p.427.
- 34 Joseph Freeman, An American Testament (New York, Farrar and Rinehart, Inc., 1936).
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## CHAPTER VII

## UPTON SINCLAIR AND THE JAZZ

## AGE: A QUIXOTE IN A FLIVER.

During the 1920s Joseph Freeman spent a weekend at Floyd Dell's home. There he met Upton Sinclair for the first time. He described this meeting.

'He was short, stocky, bronzed by the Pasadena sun and talked endlessly with extraordinary self-assurance and energy. The guests listened to Upton as to an oracle, without criticisms and without question ... After dinner, Lydia turned on the phonograph and suggested that we dance; but Dell, himself a dance enthusiast called us aside and asked us not to dance while Sinclair was there. Lydia turned to Sinclair himself: Good heavens, why? The novelist explained at great length that dancing was immoral because it was nothing more than a form of sex-play. 'It is not true', we said; 'or true so remotely that it is practically unimportant and suppose dancing is a form of sex-play, what of it'? Sinclair's puritanism was 'obdurante'; in regard to alcohol and sex his views approached those of the Methodist church though his rationalizations were different.'

The twenties heralded the beginning of a serious study of Sinclair's work. The critics who wrote during this period offer an important understanding of his position in both the radical movement and in the literary world. The bulk of surviving criticism is the work of left wing writers, who have in the main assessed Sinclair's work in the light of his contribution to American letters. The dominant theme emerging from this close scrutiny is a search for the failure of American radicalism within Sinclair's writing. The outcome of this search was the apportionment of some blame to him by a number of critics and the setting up of him as a scapegoat by

many others. This happened firstly because of the brand of socialism he preached and secondly because of the general intellectual climate of the twenties.

Sinclair's socialism was a combination of various elements from his immediate environment and his background. Scriabine saw him as basically a Christian moralist imbued with late nineteenth century romanticism. Although he was a Marxist it 'was merely the outer peel while Christianity was the core'.<sup>1</sup> The Christian Socialist was a common type between 1880 and 1900. In this period Sinclair's particular brand of socialism was forged and in doing so he became a symbol of this age. Alfred Kazin was one writer who adhered to this view. Writing some years later Kazin noted:

He will remain a touchy and curious symbol of a certain old fashioned idealism and quaint romanticism that have vanished from American writing forever. Something more than a serious novelist he must always seem one of the original missionaries of the modern spirit of America, one of the last links with the Halcyon days when Marxists still sounded like Methodists and a leading socialist like Eugene V. Debs believed in the spirit of love.<sup>2</sup>

This form of socialism led more radical doctrinaires to reject his writing. In Sinclair's work was found good intentions but these get one nowhere without a firmly-held doctrine of change, peaceful or otherwise. Within his novels, pamphlets and periodicals they interpreted the failure of radicalism in America. The failure of the American left to unite and establish an effective Socialist Party has become a major theme in the twentieth century American history. Norman Thomas, one of the leading figures in the Socialist Party during the twenties, lamented in 1950:

By any simple interpretation of the Marxist formula the United States by all odds the greatest industrial nation and one in which capitalism is most advanced

should have long ere this a very strong socialist movement if not a socialist revolution. Actually ... in no advanced Western nation is organized socialism so weak.<sup>3</sup>

Historian Carl Degler joins with many other writers in seeing very clear reasons why this situation has persisted. These reasons are not only answers to the question of leftist failure, but go a long way to explaining Sinclair's rejection by the mainstream of radicals.

Throughout the American labour movement, the majority of leaders and members have taken a conservative stance in matters of political or industrial reform. Historically, socialism has been the gospel of a class-conscious working class. This consciousness, while very evident in Europe where class lines had been clearly drawn for several centuries, was practically non-existent in the United States. While social mobility was severely constricted both in practice and law in Europe, there was a certain fluidity within the social strata of American society. In literary forms, such as Horatio Alger's 'rags to riches' morality tales, the idea of rapid movement up the social ladder was fostered and widely popularized. Degler concludes that the lasting effect of the Alger myth is that 'as long as Horatio Alger means anything to Americans Karl Marx will just be another German Philosopher'.<sup>4</sup>

Another contributing factor to the socialist failure was the political evolution of the United States. In Europe the vote had come late to workers and they tended to view themselves as primarily a labour force and only secondly as citizens with influence in society. Thus their voting patterns were conditioned by their perception of their personal advantage rather than by any desire to reform the society in which

they lived. By contrast in the United States male suffrage was established long before the advent of industrialization. By the outbreak of the Civil War most Americans tended to vote as citizens rather than as working men and their party affiliations were not conditional by economic aspiration, but by their identification with either the Republican or Democratic parties. This separation of economics and politics still exists today.

This situation was not altered by the huge influx of immigrants indoctrinated in European Socialism which flooded into the United States during the period between 1850 and 1900. There was no noticeable gain in socialist popularity although the two million newly arrived German immigrants certainly swelled numbers. The Germans and other ethnic groups not only brought with them their socialism but also their racial and national prejudices. These long-harboured prejudices effectively split the fledgling Socialist Party. This fracturing of party membership further weakened the strained unity existing between the several radical groups which came under the socialist umbrella.

However, despite these internal divisions within the movement, one reason from the external environment stands above all others in explaining the meagre success of socialism in the United States. It was simply the incredible success of capitalism. In the 'land of opportunity' capitalism provided an economic opening for every newly-arrived immigrant. Although often small, this opening was far more promising than the economic and social stagnation endured in Europe. Working men could expect good wages and a high

standard of living. Degler records that in 1902, a commission composed of twenty three labour leaders and sponsored by a businessman Alfred Mosley, made a study comparing American and British workers. The commission concluded the American was 'better educated, better housed, better clothed and more energetic than his British brother'.<sup>5</sup>

The commission's findings reinforced the widely held belief the United States was a place of exceptional opportunity and advancement. Thus was born a cult of worshipping success and the development of a materialistic mentality. This cult has subsequently affected Americans' own perspective of themselves and their society. The cult decrees that industrialists and 'Big Business' should be respected and admired because of the prestige of their success. This admiration has ensured that businessmen have not been viewed as figures of oppression who ought to be deposed, but rather as examples who ought to be emulated: they are, in other words, the friends, not the enemies, of the common man.

Degler asserts that the widespread acceptance of this view is a 'measure of the failure of anti-business protest movements of this era, like Greenbackism, Populism and Socialism and several other lesser movements. Throughout the twentieth century the sanctity of businessmen has remained almost untouched. Short periods of disenchantment have always been followed by a return to long periods of pro-business public opinion. In this environment, socialism could not be nurtured and radicalism in general was apt to founder on the rock of capitalistic success.

Socialist Leon Samson, while accepting these reasons,

went further and suggested that psychological reasons play an important part in understanding the shortcomings of American radicalism. Samson 'undertook to account for the failure of socialism to win the allegiance of the American working class'.<sup>6</sup> The Samson thesis asserts that:

Americanism is not so much a tradition as it is a doctrine, it is what socialism is to the socialist, Americanism to the American is a body of ideas like democracy, liberty, opportunity to all of which the American adheres to rationalistically much as a socialist adheres to his socialism - because it does him good, because it gives him work, so he thinks it guarantees him happiness, America has thus served as a substitute for socialism.<sup>7</sup>

Samson concluded that socialism failed because 'every concept in socialism had its substitute counter-concept in Americanism'. The promises socialism offered were already available in America. Thus, equality, the prospect of a classless society, and economic advancement that had captured the imagination of the European proletariat offered no allure to the American workman.

These various reasons proposed for the failure of socialism within the American context have gained many advocates throughout the twentieth century. It is obvious that a combination of them has been responsible. Leftist critics writing in the twenties and thirties viewed the novels of Upton Sinclair as capturing and in some cases creating the forces which stifled the development of socialism and a class-conscious workforce. It must be noted that these writers wrote in a period when American liberalism was in a serious decline and many of them mourned the rapidly disappearing tradition of the previous twenty years. In this era, progressivism had been strong and had acted as an effective moral



and political force. It was an age dominated by reformers and muckrakers, a time when newspapers and periodicals readily printed and publicized liberal crusades and campaigns. By 1920, however, this climate had greatly changed. Liberals quickly became resigned to observing post-war prosperity and triumphant big business in both the marketplace and the White House with the successive elections of Republican Administrations.

Although Sinclair undoubtedly remained one of the few who continued actively to advocate the progressive tradition through the twenties, his efforts were generally dismissed by the 'purer socialist critics of the left'. The first real salvo fired by this group appeared in 1921. Carl Van Doren, writing shortly after the notorious Palmer Raids and with a selection of Sinclair's most proletarian fiction available, described Sinclair as a 'proletarian radical whose writings he found coloured by an expansive passion for humanity at large'.<sup>8</sup> This 'expansive passion' had been very visible during the war years when Sinclair's radicalism was tempered by his desire to ensure the advancement of humanitarian goals at the expense of his Socialist Party principles. The comments of Van Doren and intellectuals such as Van Wyck Brooks reflect the frustration of leftist intellectuals with American workers during the prosperity of the twenties. Brooks maintained that, 'If Mr Sinclair's books show us anything real they show us the utter helplessness, the benignness, the naivete of the American workers' movement'.<sup>8</sup> Sinclair's novels not only highlighted these deficiencies but unfortunately served to create new ones. Brooks concluded with a concerted criticism of Sinclair's

work:

Nothing hinders the workers so much as books like Mr Sinclair's. These false simplifications, these appeals to martyrdom in human nature are so much dust thrown in the eyes of the proletariat to the workers themselves, in other words Mr Sinclair with his coke and circuses is more dangerous than all the businessmen he chastises with whips and scorpions.<sup>9</sup>

In the opinion of leftist intellectuals, Sinclair preyed upon the workers he so sincerely attempted to help. By reducing the labour struggle to simple terms and making it readily accessible to the working class he robbed socialism of its ideological foundation. Without this foundation socialism became blurred and to the American mind merged easily into the 'vague' atmosphere of the twenties liberalism.

By contrast one of the more prominent radicals of the twenties, Michael Gold, viewed Sinclair in a completely different light. He believed that Sinclair, rather than betraying American radicalism, embodied the essence of the movement. Gold, a doctrinaire leftist member of the Communist Party, lamented the failure of radicals to capture the support of the working classes. In Sinclair's style, Gold observed a rapport between the author and his public. Gold respected Sinclair's uncanny ability to communicate with an audience that few contemporary writers could match. He also admired Sinclair's historical role in the radical movement, describing him as the 'bard of industrial America, the great American pioneer in revolutionary fiction ... the most important writer in America'.<sup>10</sup>

Although Gold praised and admired Sinclair's contribution he was acutely aware of his limitations both as a writer and as a true radical. This was clearly illustrated

in correspondence between them in 1923. Sinclair had been considering starting another radical magazine and asked Mike Gold to collaborate on the project with him.

A few months later The Liberator magazine had been bought by the Workers' Party. It proved to be an important turning point in the history of the radical and liberal writer in America. Before this take-over the radical magazines (including The Comrade, The Masses and The Liberator) had been managed and directed by the writers themselves. As independent radicals they did not hesitate to criticize Socialist or Communist Party policy. This was another factor adding to the disunity of the radical movement. With the purchase of The Liberator, 'a radical magazine of arts and letters and politics' was owned and directed by a radical party; and this party itself differed from previous radical parties because of its relationship to the Communist International.

Although the younger writers and artists had no quarrel with the party line many had no interest in a purely political magazine and gradually withdrew. Sinclair, however, was one of a group of older contributors who advocated the revival of The Masses in a new form or to at least provide a substitute for the older publications. With this idea in mind Sinclair had written to Gold. Gold had already given some thought to a 'literary magazine of the revolution',<sup>11</sup> though he hesitated to collaborate with Sinclair. He replied to Sinclair's suggestion:

It is like being asked by a pure young girl in marriage ... when one is a battered old rogue with five or six affairs on hand. I am immoral, Upton, I drink, smoke,

swear, loaf, sneer, shoot pool, dance jazz, shake the shimmy, ride box-cars, and do most everything. I would rather take a long walk into the country with a bunch of roughnecks than write a novel. I cannot be pious and love Jesus. I used to, but I don't anymore. After I have been with good people, formal people, however revolutionary for more than a month or two, I want to bust loose and to do something wild, etc. I am not boasting about all this; I just don't want you to labour under any misapprehensions. I am a good red, etc., and take that seriously enough, but it might get on your nerves if you found me smoking six or seven cigars a day, and hanging out in bootlegging joints with a bunch of wobblies. I can't be as pure, fervent and puritanical as yourself Upton, and I would not want to be. The mass of humanity, stupid or intellectual, is fond of any kind of fun, sensuality, relaxation, sport and frivolity, and I am one of them'.<sup>12</sup>

Gold also expressed serious doubts about the audience that Sinclair would aim for. He advised Sinclair not to compete with established radical newspapers and vie for their public but rather capture the younger generation. 'No one else', said Gold, 'had such influence with young thinkers as Sinclair, no one combined the artist and revolutionary so admirably'.<sup>13</sup> Daniel Aaron, in perhaps the definitive work on leftist writing<sup>14</sup> concluded:

Nothing came of Sinclair's magazine project as Gold must have expected. He loved and admired him as a fighter who stuck to his guns whose life had purpose, who wasn't a lousy dilatante, but deplored his puritanism; he admired his splendid indignation but accused him of loving 'some ideal you have formed of the working class not the working class themselves'. Sinclair's revolutionary magazine would have been juiceless and joyless: gold's ideal magazine gay and tolerant. <sup>15</sup>

Aaron and Gold's assessment of Sinclair gives a good insight into why he was in such a limbo during the twenties. When Aaron comments that Gold admired Sinclair as 'a fighter who stuck to his guns' he pinpointed the reasons for Sinclair's rejection in the decade. Simply stated, the radical climate had greatly changed whereas Sinclair had not. In a letter to

Sinclair, Gold advised 'his crusading friend':<sup>16</sup>

Attack the filthy, the blood-stained luxuries on the rich all you want to, but don't moralize against the poor little jug of wine and hopeful song of the worker. It helps him to live and fight. I love humour, joy and happy people; I love big groups at play, and friends sitting about a table, talking and smoking and laughing ...

I wish the world were all play and everybody happy and creative as children. That is communism, the communism of the future. Meanwhile there is a lot of dirty work to do and a dirty world to live in. Let's do it as communistically as we can.<sup>17</sup>

Obviously there is divided opinion as to Sinclair's place in the radical movement and in the literature of the twenties. However two facts are not in contention. Firstly the radical movement was deeply divided between recognisable factions. Secondly Upton Sinclair played an important role in the single event which unified the various radical elements during this decade.

The subject of innumerable books and articles, The Sacco Vanzetti Case stands as a landmark to a time in American history when the divided factions of the American left joined together. The case involved the prosecution of Sicilian immigrant anarchists, Bartolomeo Vanzetti and Nicola Sacco. They were charged with the murder of a security guard during the armed robbery of a warehouse. They were eventually found guilty and sentenced to death. The case and verdict aroused considerable controversy and raised a number of questions as to the impartiality of the judge and the honesty of the jury and the effects of the adverse media publicity engendered by the 'Red Scare'. The affair threw into dramatic relief the revolutionary, anarchist and liberal efforts to define justice and to clarify left wing policy. It became the crucial

struggle between left and right and the unifying force for the radical movement in the twenties.

In this atmosphere of rapidly developing unity there remained a group of rebel writers who, having no strong affiliations to any groups, floated between the various left-ist factions. As already noted this group of unclassified rebels included Upton Sinclair. Sinclair's political limbo had definite parallels with his position in the American literary scene. Throughout this decade Sinclair felt alienated from the mainstream of American literature. This alienation compelled him to explore the reasons for the change in direction of this mainstream. In response to this need he produced his pamphlets Money Writes and Mammonart which formed part of his Dead Hand Series.

Both these works concluded that literature was being poisoned by the dying capitalist culture. His thesis maintained that only with an economic crash could the conditions come about in which he would be comfortable in the American literary environment. Despite his feelings of insecurity during the late twenties, he wrote two of his finest works at this time. The first of these was Oil, written and published in 1927. One of Sinclair's favourite novels, Oil was written out of his interest in the Tea Pot Dome scandal which severely undermined the Harding Administration in 1924.<sup>18</sup> Because of his wife's sickness, his research for the novel had to be curtailed until two years later.

During this time he became personally involved in oil speculation and exploration, a phenomenon that gripped many parts of the United States during the twenties. His wife had

invested in some leases on Signal Hill, near Long Beach, California. The discovery of oil under Signal Hill and the subsequent legal and financial complication that emerged gave him a valuable insight and experience for his novel. Interspersed with his investigations into the oil industry and inevitable manipulation by big business, Sinclair managed to weave in the Hollywood myth, the labour struggle, socialism, the various facts of the era and the religious fervour engendered by itinerant preachers like Aimee Semple Macpherson.

Oil artistically represents Sinclair's return to a serious novel. Not since King Coal had he attempted any real character development in his work. The leading character in Oil, Bunny, son of a successful industrialist, has a more active role than most of Sinclair's protagonists and foreshadows the personality of Lanny in the Lanny Budd novels,<sup>19</sup> Sinclair's most human character. Oil has as its major theme, as always, the education of the protagonist. Just as Hal Warner in King Coal becomes aware of the suffering of and plight of the common man, and so converted to socialism, Bunny becomes actively involved in a labour struggle within his father's oil fields.

The completed novel was released on 25 March, 1927. The novel was commercially successful and reasonably well received by the critics. Part of this success stemmed from public reaction to the suppression of the novel in Boston, where the chief of police had taken exception to many scenes and banned its sale within the city. Sinclair later wrote:

I never shall forget that amiable elderly chief of police who put his arm about my shoulder and specified a passage in the story in which an older sister tells her brother about the existence of 'birth control'.

'Now, Mr Sinclair, you know nobody ought to put a thing like that into a novel'. I assured him that I would not put it in except that I thought it both true and important.<sup>20</sup>

Sinclair's response to the chief's objection was to commission a new printing of the novel. His instructions to the printer were to black out with fig leaves the offending passages. He then personally sold copies on Boston Common hoping to be arrested for contravening censorship laws.<sup>21</sup>

It was ironic that Boston should be the only place to ban Oil because Sinclair's next novel was set in that city and carried the name of the old and traditional city. While hawking his fig leaf edition of Oil and eluding the attention of the city's constabulary, Sinclair took time to visit Bartolemeo Vanzetti, who was awaiting execution. At that time, radicals were organizing a concerted effort to reopen the cases of Vanzetti and his accomplice Nicola Sacco.

Sinclair had become interested in the case as early as 1922 long before it reached the attention of American radicals and intellectuals. He had visited Vanzetti in prison shortly after his arrest. Sinclair had been greatly impressed by Vanzetti's intelligence and kindness and became convinced that Vanzetti was incapable of murder. Throughout the six year wait on Death Row, Sinclair kept in touch with the case. After Vanzetti and Sacco were executed on 22 August 1927, Sinclair returned to Boston and began gathering material for a planned two-volume novel dealing with the case. Two weeks before the execution, he had written to his friend Mrs Kate Crane Gartz, the millionaire socialist:

I have decided to place the scene of the next novel in Boston and deal in part with the Sacco-Vanzetti case. What I want to do is go quietly and gather material for



a big novel, and take a couple of years to write it. I will call it by the name Boston and make it a byword to the rest of the civilized world.<sup>22</sup>

The executions, however, meant that Sinclair's plans had to be changed. He spent six weeks researching in Boston. The briefness of his stay was conditioned by the necessity for speed. He revised his schedule, planning to release the completed novel on the first anniversary of the deaths of Sacco and Vanzetti. Sinclair's information came from several sources. He interviewed lawyers and journalists involved in the case and drew upon four main primary sources. He carefully examined the Newsletter of the Sacco-Vanzetti Committee, which gave a detailed and lengthy report of the trial proceedings. Equally important were the leftist publications, New Leader and Daily Worker and the major daily newspapers, The New York Times and The Boston American.

Christine Scriabine, who has carefully studied Sinclair's resource materials for Boston, held in the Lilly Library,<sup>23</sup> Indiana, records that they are important tools for understanding Sinclair's writing technique. The Lilly Library holds a scrapbook of newspaper clippings, reporting graft, corruption and injustice in numerous cases before District and Supreme Courts. Sinclair has taken these reports and transcribed them almost word for word in Boston. These factual reports give Sinclair's novel an air of authenticity. He found that because of the huge bulk of information available, his novel threatened to grow too large for publication. In an attempt to meet his deadline he was writing and revising almost a thousand words a day. Eventually he completed the work in April 1928.

The finished novel successfully captured 'in fictional

form the essential radical experience in the twenties and it was found in the expression of Sacco and Vanzetti's defence,<sup>24</sup> Sinclair confessed in his autobiography that Boston was his first conscious attempt to write a contemporary historical work. The success of this attempt can be judged by C. Louis Joughlin and Edmund M. Morgan's summary of it:

Boston contains a thorough review of almost all the important features of the Sacco-Vanzetti case. It is accurate in detail to a degree that one would expect of a scientific study and it has qualities of proportion in its judgement which indicate careful thinking. The combination of completeness, accuracy and penetration places Boston in the first rank of historical novels. <sup>25</sup>

Boston represents a novel in which Sinclair found a proper, indeed perfect subject to fit his method. The novel vividly illustrates his wide-ranging sound conscience and sympathies. As in many of his earlier works, he displays his superb reportorial skills and his instinctive ability to interpret and handle materials of contemporary history. In the case of Boston, these seem to have reached the pinnacle of his ability; he achieved in that work a level of performance not reached before or after. Although Sinclair's technique in this novel is highly polished, the content itself is equally impressive. His main theme is the solidarity of the radical movement, a theme, which would have been, in the light of his own experiences, a cherished dream. Sinclair also set a personal precedent by his choice of leading character.

Cornelia Thornwell is a sixty-year-old, socially prominent Bostonian aristocrat. She bears witness to events in Boston with the aid of her grand-daughter, Betty Alan, who serves as her eyes and ears in places where Cornelia is unable

to be present. Cornelia's development follows a familiar 'Sinclairian Pattern' by giving up the security of a rich lifestyle and joining the workforce in a factory. Although the widow of a former Governor of Massachusetts and mother of three prominent daughters, she leaves her home and goes to live with an Italian family, taking a job in a cordage works. Lodging in the same house is a Italian workman, Bartolemeo Vanzetti, who greatly impresses Cornelia. While at the factory, Cornelia is involved in anti-war demonstrations and helps to organize a strike. This begins a change or development of her personality which leads her to fight for justice, but does not convert her to radical militancy.<sup>26</sup> By contrast, Betty's conversion is far more complete. Through her, Sinclair symbolically represents the Sacco-Vanzetti case as a symptom of the general climate of capitalist injustice rather than a disease itself.

Sinclair plays down Vanzetti's anarchism while depicting him as basically a humanitarian, in fact, as a 'Christ-like figure'. By the juxtaposition of the differing perspectives of the case held by Betty and Cornelia, Sinclair is able to present a balanced view while making it clear that his own personal attitude is more closely attuned to that of Cornelia's. His own crusade for Sacco and Vanzetti was not inspired by any conversion to a political ideology, but by his own sense of social justice. Just as Cornelia never becomes completely radicalized, Sinclair shows an unwillingness to subjugate his own personal brand of socialism to the extremist line during the trial. It was a decision which ensured that his partial alienation from the left the twenties would become complete

during the more radical thirties.

The actual structure of Boston is in two parts. The fictional account of Cornelia and the 'corporate wrongdoings',<sup>27</sup> of the Thornwell Clan forms the first half of the novel. Set against this backdrop is the second part of the novel which is almost a documentary account of the Sacco and Vanzetti case.

This documentary technique, used throughout Sinclair's work, is seen to its best advantage in the closing pages of Boston. G. Louis Joughlin and Edmund Morgan, when reviewing the Sacco and Vanzetti trial in 1948 praised Sinclair's assessment of the case. Sinclair's accuracy is even more remarkable when it is considered that he did not have the benefit of the complete transcript of the court case nor did he have the advantage of hindsight to reveal the obvious inaccuracies of the trial. Equally clear was the inept nature of the defence afforded Sacco and Vanzetti. Sinclair's loyalty to the radical conglomerate, however, dictated that he could not attack fellow 'committed radicals'. While some critics generously applauded his accuracy, others were quick to point out that he did tamper with the truth in a number of places. Whether his portrayal of Judge Thayer was premeditated in its emphasis or merely fashioned out of his inability to interpret and understand human nature is unclear.

Sinclair's overwhelming desire to prove economic factors as the main reasons for the outcome of the trial conveniently ignored human failings such as laziness, stupidity and psychological limitations, all of which were present during the trial. Sinclair's Thayer in particular is an

interesting characterization. There still exists speculation as to whether Thayer, who exerted a great deal of influence over the proceedings was merely stupid rather than villainous. Thayer was undoubtedly prejudiced against defendants and this fact coupled with their poor defence and unfavourable media publicity ensured that they would be found guilty.

The publication of Boston, appearing almost eighteen months after the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti, received generally good reviews. The only negative reaction appeared in the Boston newspapers, but it is probable that their main objection to the novel amused Sinclair. A few years earlier his novel Oil had been banned in Boston because of its 'explicit' discussion of sexuality. Even earlier in his career Sinclair had learned that publishing houses, municipal councils, and newspapers were quite happy to circulate and absorb scandals concerning other cities and countries as long as everything appeared clean in their own backyards. For example, in 1906 Sinclair's publication of The Jungle had been greeted with universal praise - except in the Chicago newspapers.

Sinclair was happy with the critical reaction to Boston. In the same year as he published that novel, the radical movement paid tribute to him by dedicating the November 1928 edition of New Masses to him in honour of his distinguished fifty-year career as a radical and in particular his contribution to the Sacco and Vanzetti crusade. Although the majority of the left expressed satisfaction with Boston, the more extreme elements were disappointed. In an anarchist publication The Road to Freedom,<sup>28</sup> Sinclair was castigated

as a poor historian. The assessment was probably due to his depiction of Vanzetti. Sinclair's subjugation of Vanzetti's anarchism while increasing public sympathy, outraged anarchist groups who viewed this action as a perversion of the truth.

Although both Oil and Boston were Sinclair's artistic highpoints during the twenties and his first real financial and critical successes since King Coal (1917), both contained the glaring faults which had been present in other novels. Critics repeatedly pointed to Sinclair's 'inability to comprehend the tragic complexity of social conflicts that can be found in any of his novels even the most successful'.<sup>29</sup> Sinclair was apparently oblivious to this failing and those critics sympathetic to him chose to gloss over these flaws. Along with Sinclair, they believed that the ills of society could be solved with simple solutions, and that the purpose of literature was to indicate the method of finding those solutions.

The solutions in Sinclair's world were easily found because the problems were simple. In his world, his physical and literal world, there was only black and white, good and bad. Writing in 1928 R.N. Linscott lamented the lack of greyness in Sinclair's writing. He sought reasons for this simplistic and naive analysis of American society and concluded:

Upton Sinclair is one of the too-late borne. An idealist, a doctrinaire, an austere believer in reason and the rights of man, his spiritual home is among the utopians of the last century ... he is one of the old believers.<sup>30</sup>

Linscott then reviewed Boston. He echoed many of the criticisms made by earlier writers while adding his acknowledgement of Sinclair's skills as a propagandist:

As art Sinclair's novel, Boston is worthless as propaganda it is superb. He has a theme and a character that ride triumphant over technical disabilities and he has a living conscience as he works towards a climax, the pretense of fiction gradually falls away and in the last magnificent chapters the book becomes a piece of glorified reporting. Concurrently, the heat of the author's indignation rises steadily higher until at the end, the reader is left with a sense of having himself been cleansed and purified by fire and humbled by great tragedy.<sup>31</sup>

The work of liberal writers, intellectuals and the unified efforts of several leftist groups served to elevate Sacco and Vanzetti to the status of martyrs. The personal efforts of Sinclair and the response engendered by Boston undoubtedly contributed to this status. The 'martyrdom' of these two anarchists swung many American artists and intellectuals violently leftwards. Unfortunately, this general shift to the left during the thirties was soon to leave Upton Sinclair well behind.

## QUIXOTE IN A FLIVER

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- 18 The Tea Pot Dome Scandals ... the administration of  
Warren C. Harding became notorious for lack of accomp-  
lishment and tarnished by scandal. Perhaps the most  
infamous of these was The Teapot Dome Scandal. In 1924,  
President Harding named Albert B. Fall Secretary to the  
Department of the Interior, a move which alarmed conserv-  
ationists. Fall had contacts with numerous businessmen  
while in office. With the knowledge of Secretary of the  
Navy, Denby, Fall 'entered into a corrupt alliance' with  
the Doheny and Sinclair Oil interests to give them con-  
trol of immensely valuable naval oil reserves. Doheny's  
company was given the leases to the Elk Hills Reserve  
in California while the huge Sinclair Corporation was  
given the Tea Pot Dome Reserve in Wyoming. Fall received  
over \$400,000 from the two corporations. The scandal was  
eventually unearthed and an investigation conducted by  
Senator Thomas Walsh of Montana forced the resignation of



both Fall and Denby. The leases were cancelled by the civil courts and criminal prosecutions sent Fall and Sinclair to prison.

- 19 The Lanny Budd novels were an ambitious series of social chronicles which occupied Sinclair throughout the 1940s. There were eleven volumes in this series, the first appearing in 1940 and the last in 1953. Lanny Budd as the century figure is one of Sinclair's most popular characterizations. During the three million word narrative Lanny is involved in most of the major events in European twentieth century history. This series re-established Sinclair as a commercially successful novelist. Dragons Teeth (1942) won him the Pulitzer Prize.
- 20 Sinclair, Autobiography, p.253.
- 21 Boston book dealers voluntarily withdrew copies of Oil. The New York Times reported in April 1927 that J. Gritz, a bookseller's clerk had been arrested and held on \$200 bail for selling a copy of Oil. One of the main reasons Sinclair failed to get arrested was the court's decision to await the outcome of Gritz' trial. Part of the success of the novel was due to this kind of publicity.
- 22 Quoted in Scriabine, Witness to History, p.145.
- 23 The Lilly Library houses the almost 8 tonnes of Sinclair's personal papers, letters and manuscripts.
- 24 Scriabine, p.146.
- 25 G. Louis Jouglin and Edmund Morgan, The Legacy of Sacco and Vanzetti, (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1948), p.445.
- 26 Ronald Gottesman, Upton Sinclair: An annotated Bibliographical Catalogue 1894-1932. Indiana University, Ph.D. thesis (1964), p.151.
- 27 IBID, p.157.
- 28 IBID, p.163.
- 29 IBID, p.164:
- 30 Quoted in Gottesman, p.165, R.N. Linscott, 'Super Journalism', a review of Boston in The Saturday Night Review of Literature, December 1928, p.425.
- 31 IBID, p.425.

## CHAPTER VIII

'I, GOVERNOR OF CALIFORNIA  
AND HOW I ENDED POVERTY.'

'... With all your good intentions, you are doing enormous injury to the socialist cause ... I rather suspect you may have occasion to regret this error in judgement almost as much as you regretted your support of Wilson in the war to end war'.

Norman Thomas, commenting on Upton Sinclair's decision to resign from the Socialist Party to run as the Democratic candidate for Governor of California.

After World War I Sinclair's writing took on a distinctive character. Disregarding the general disillusionment of intellectuals during the 1920s he continued 'to muckrake when no one else was muckraking'.<sup>1</sup> Although almost impotent politically he performed an essential role in exposing the capitalist control of major American institutions. While many writers complained about the economic, political and social manipulation of the powerful vested interests, Sinclair was the only one who 'systematically studied and documented these injustices'.<sup>2</sup> In essence he rested his entire thesis on two assumptions: 'Wall Street ruled the money market and the money market ruled American society'.<sup>3</sup> As a consequence he attacked every institution of American society as being run and funded by capitalist interests. His lack of ideological understanding in his analysis of capitalism is considered by modern historians to be one of his greatest shortcomings as a novelist. His limited ideological understanding also extended to Marxism. As early as 1915 Lenin had scolded him

for not having an ideological basis to his socialism. This partly explains his isolation in the twenties and thirties.

Another contributing factor to his isolation was his attitude to the creation of socialism within America. Sinclair had predicted in The Industrial Republic (1907) that the United States would have a socialist government by 1913 and the first socialist President would be William Hearst. Although these predictions proved to be embarrassingly inaccurate he still favoured constitutional methods for implementing socialism. He was opposed to revolutionary uprising on the grounds that the conservative mood of the times would ensure its failure. He favoured a policy of compensation rather than confiscation because of his fear that any other method would result in widespread destruction, poverty and loss of human life. He had great hopes for a non-violent socialist revolution. This attitude, however, was out of step with the majority of socialists in the twenties.

Although he abhorred violence he did foresee certain situations in which the use of force by the working classes could be justified. One situation would be if the capitalist classes ever used violence to crush the labour movement. Another would be if economic conditions and an absence of reforms drove workers to desperation and a third would be 'if the capitalist rulers of the major powers appeared on the verge of starting another world war'.<sup>4</sup>

This type of reasoning highlights the nature of Sinclair's political dilemma during the twenties. While wanting significant changes in American society he was unwilling to endorse the methods advocated by many radicals. He wanted a peaceful transition of power to the left. Because of his,

and the socialists' firm commitment to democratic methods they both rejected Lenin's concept of 'the revolutionary vanguard'. Their rejection alienated them from the mainstream of radical thought and action of this period.

Fretz points out accurately that although Sinclair displayed confusion over his philosophies concerning implementing the new socialist order, he was in doubt as to what had to be achieved once the change had taken place. He believed in the nationalization of railroads, telephone and telegraph companies, oil fields, large factories and all major packing plants, warehouses, stores and office buildings. In the end, socialism would enable mankind to solve all its problems. A new order would replace the old, giving birth to the 'socialist man'.<sup>5</sup> This transformation would, in Sinclair's terms, be achieved with the aid of the capitalist classes. This idea is clearly reflected in his choice of characters in all his major novels of this period. In the late twenties and early thirties his protagonists are all capitalists, Bunny Ross in Oil (1927), Cornelia Thornwell in Boston (1928), Jedd Rusher in Mountain City (1930) and Luke Faber in Roman Holiday (1931). Fretz concludes:

His portrayal of these aristocrats in a favourable light seemed to contradict his previous statements and his omission of the class struggle in the latter two novels was a rejection of his rules outlined in Money Writes.<sup>6</sup>

Sinclair had always appeared contradictory both within his personal statements and in those of his novels. But they were highlighted in the twenties and because of the political and intellectual climate of the time they were not allowed to go unpunished. They greatly contributed to his isolation and alienation. He found himself increasingly out of step with

radical theory and his brand of nineteenth century optimism in the American working class was unique during the 1920s. He was also haunted by the spectre of his support for American intervention in World War I and by his fluctuating attitude towards Soviet Russia. Ultimately it was these two factors that completed his alienation.

One of the major developments in the radical movement during the 1920s was the formation of The John Reed Clubs. Their importance lay chiefly in their implication for the 1930s. These organizations or clubs took their name from a famous American communist, John Reed, who reported the Bolshevik Revolution and later returned to Russia to play an important role in the establishment of the first Soviet Government. It was Mike Gold who revived the legend of John Reed and used his image to eradicate the stereotyped image of the communist.

Reed wrote Ten Days That Shook the World an account of the Bolshevik Revolution which still remains the best one volume work on the subject. After he had completed the book he returned to the United States and turned his attention to analysing the American radical movement. Reed's analysis of the Socialist Party in the late 1910s is especially revealing because the criticisms he made were still relevant in the thirties. Reed was opposed to conservative socialists and wanted to bring all radicals together on a platform of social democracy. This platform was something Sinclair had strived to achieve for several years. Unfortunately for Sinclair, Reed included him in his criticism of conservative writers and novelists.

It should be noted that both writers had been critical

of each other. Sinclair had called Reed 'the playboy of the social revolution', a title he resented and never really lived down. They publicly disagreed over Russia. Sinclair deplored the Bolshevik dictatorship whereas Reed attacked Sinclair's distinction between Western and German capitalism. Although they disagreed, in reality they were not dissimilar in motivation and outlook. Both Reed and Sinclair were not real intellectuals: abstract principles seldom moved them to action, their sympathies were quickened by what they saw with their eyes more than by what they perceived with their minds.<sup>7</sup>

Sinclair had originally expressed great satisfaction with the Bolshevik Revolution. In 1924 he wrote that 'historians of the future will regard the Russian revolution as the greatest event in the history of mankind'.<sup>8</sup> As with so much of Sinclair's writing and theory he was prone to changing and often contradicting his statements. Although he advocated non-violent revolution and believed in socialism through constitutional means, in the Russian context he employed a different system of ethics. He argued as early as 1919 'that violent revolution was the only method of a change in a land of oppression like Zsarist Russia'.<sup>9</sup> Fretz quotes Sinclair's defence of the Bolshevik dictatorship in Boston. Sinclair's statements illustrate his double-standard and Machiavellian attitude towards Russia:

I do not like tyranny any more than you do, but can you for a moment persuade yourself that this semi-barbarous empire could be governed today by any other method than the ones the Soviets are using ... the Soviet government seems to me so much the best of anything possible for Russia today - well, I support it, that's all.<sup>10</sup>

He appears to have condoned violence in 'semi-barbarous' lands while insisting upon democratic and non-violent

change in Western countries. He was willing to accept violence 'provided that it resulted in a government which ruled in the interests of the workers'.<sup>11</sup>

Sinclair's penchant for contradiction was another factor which contributed to his isolation. In fact his position in the 1930s was already visible in the early twenties. Although labelled a conservative by John Reed (an opinion shared by many radicals) at the same time he was attacked by conservatives who viewed him as a dangerous radical. One good example appeared on 21 April 1923 in The New York Times. The newspaper quoted R.M. Whitney in an address to The American Legion as describing Sinclair 'as a menace to the United States'.<sup>12</sup> As if to prove Whitney's claims five days later the newspaper reported that Sinclair had been arrested for attempting to hold a forbidden meeting<sup>13</sup> only a day after his arrest for reading the First Amendment aloud at a strike meeting in San Pedro. By 1923 Sinclair was undoubtedly walking through the 'radical twilight zone', in a position from which he could be easily potted by both sides.

John Reed left for Russia in September 1919 as a delegate of the newly founded Communist Labour Party. While in Russia he talked with Lenin and Trotsky and was appointed to the Executive Committee of the Communist International. But on 17 October 1920 he died of typhus. His body lay in state in the Labour Temple in Moscow and was guarded by soldiers of the Red Guard, and was eventually buried within the Kremlin Wall. He was also honoured by the Russian people as a hero. It was this symbolism that Gold wanted to take advantage of in the American radical movement. John Reed Clubs flourished throughout the United States. From the beginning one of the

basic disputes involving members was whether to allow the conservative radicals to remain in the organization or to dispense with them. Many clubs had actively opposed the recruitment of radicalized intellectuals, being more concerned with discovering and encouraging new proletarian writers.

The various issues came to a head in 1930. Between 6 and 15 November 1930 the Second World Plenum of International Bureaux of Revolutionary Literature convened at Krakov in Russia. The conference drew up a ten point plan of action for the United States. This programme highlighted some of the faults the bureaux saw in American society. In essence the programme called upon John Reed Clubs and The Masses<sup>14</sup> to extend their proletarian base and to 'enlist all the friendly intellectuals into the ranks of revolution'.<sup>15</sup>

One of the main issues hinged on the clubs' attitudes towards 'the vacillating middle class intellectuals'.<sup>16</sup> This attitude was acutely recognized by Gold who feared that sectarianism among members would keep out writers like Sinclair because of their ideological deviations. Henry Carlisle of the Hollywood John Reed Club expressed the feelings of many members when he commented on this dilemma over membership:

We must not cringe in our approach to these intellectuals ... we must teach that the first thing is to approach an organization on an organizational basis. We must not be short-sighted about Upton Sinclair who is on the Editorial Board of Literature of World Revolution, is at the same time a perennial candidate on the ticket of the Californian Socialist Party, he appears on programmes in debates with Aimee Semple MacPherson ... is our need of Sinclair so great that we can afford to fall down on principles?<sup>17</sup>

Like many radicals, Carlisle wanted to absorb the middle classes rather than aiding and pandering to them.



Sinclair fell into the group of writers and intellectuals whom club members were most divided over. On one side there were radicals who contended that it was preferable to compromise principles and allow Sinclair to belong while others steadfastly refused to grant membership to anyone who would not follow the party line. It is interesting to note that although Sinclair was attacked in America as being too conservative, in the U.S.S.R. between 1918 and 1945 almost as many (some three million) copies of his works were sold as those of any other American writer.<sup>18</sup> This is even more significant because Sinclair was never a communist.

Daniel Aaron defined two types of radical during this period. The distinction is a good illustration of the issues surrounding the acceptance of radicals during the late twenties and early thirties. Aaron differentiated between the chronically indignant rebel and the earnest revolutionary. The chronically indignant rebel is one capable of changing causes, the latter is not. The rebel turns from one injustice to another. The revolutionary on the other hand is a consistent hater who concentrates all his hatred on one subject. In terms of this definition Sinclair is undoubtedly the chronically indignant rebel whereas the John Reed Clubs and radicals like Gold sought to either produce or to capture and eventually harness the 'earnest revolutionary'.

The 'earnest revolutionaries' were concerned with winning over the intellectuals who were described as being 'cowardly, unreliable, vacillating, cynical and above all, confused'.<sup>19</sup> Because Sinclair was unclassifiable and undoctrinaire he was not considered to be part of this group. at no other time was he so completely isolated. Doctrinaire

radicals viewed these intellectuals as more of a handicap than a help to the revolutionary movement. Gold on the other hand thought they could be saved. No writer in the leftist movement worked harder to badger and convert the uncommitted radical. He agitated for Communism at a time when few people were willing to listen. As Aaron noted, it was also at a time when American communists themselves considered 'all forms of literary activity ... a childish self-indulgence, not useful, not functional'.<sup>20</sup> Gold was not, however, unaware that those who despised the intellectuals were overlooking 'that the revolution did not spring from unploughed soils'.<sup>21</sup>

During the late 1920s, many young writers found themselves in a situation similar to the one which Sinclair had experienced earlier in the decade. Many of them had been labelled as the 'hired hands of the nouveaux riche'.<sup>22</sup> By becoming pawns they had sold out their radical principles. Many more were forced to make the decision between big business and the socialist revolution. Failure to make a decision meant that young writers would be left intellectually and politically impotent. Many liberal writers were unwilling to give up their independence and isolation while many others were openly contemptuous of radicals.

Events in the late twenties however, made up the minds of many intellectuals. The two most notable events were the Sacco Vanzetti case and the 1929 economic crash. Both caused many to abandon their aloofness and enter these conflicts. According to Robert Morse Lovett, the deaths of Sacco and Vanzetti were not a 'mere dramatic episode'. Nothing since the disillusionment following World War I had 'so shaken the

liberal belief in working for equal justice or exposed his impotence in the face of organized oppression'.<sup>23</sup> The protest against their imprisonment and eventual execution had brought together a disparate group of communists, anarchists, well-meaning old ladies, idealistic students, writers, lawyers, newspaper men, labour officials, liberal Bostonians and Harvard Professors.<sup>24</sup> Of this group the communists emerged in the thirties as the strongest and most influential group.

Critics<sup>25</sup> writing in the thirties believed that writers had changed from passive and defeated observers of society to active participants. Wilson concluded that if 'the twenties were a period of self discovery and self expression then the early thirties pointed to a period of social expression'.<sup>26</sup> Several reasons were put forward to explain these changes in writers' and intellectuals' affiliations. One of the definite legacies of the Sacco Vanzetti case was the widely held conviction that the ruling class would resort to any means, even legal murder, to preserve itself.<sup>27</sup> The American Communist Party adopted Sacco and Vanzetti as symbols of the oppression of the proletariat and viewed the entire case as an episode in the conspiracy of capitalism to single out its most dangerous foes in the class war and to eliminate them'.<sup>28</sup> When the Wall Street stock market dramatically collapsed in 1929, the rottenness of capitalism could no longer be ignored. For revolutionary radicals it sounded very sweet and many believed the revolution was not far away.

With these two significant events, hundreds of intellectuals became class conscious. In the thirties the radicalization of writers became a deep rooted thing and not just

a social attitude. Previously, radical change in society had not been a mainstream interest. But now, with writers such as Theodore Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson, Waldo Frank, Granville Hicks, Newton Arvin, Malcolm Cowley, Clifton Fadiman, Lionel Trilling, Edmund Wilson, Edwin Seaver, and many others, all swinging leftwards, literary radicalism had become a central concern. This change had several implications.

Firstly it effectively cut Upton Sinclair out of any real participation in the radical movement. Throughout the twenties, he had been outside the mainstream only briefly rejoining it with his involvement with the Sacco Vanzetti case. With communism replacing socialism as the literary mainstream, Sinclair's association with it was shortlived, as extreme radicalism left him in its wake. The second implication was for socialism. Whereas previously socialism had served as a substitute for individuals, in the 1930s it was replaced with communism. A contemporary issue of Modern Quarterly contained an article which illustrated this transformation.

The magazine had sent six questions to a selected number of writers. One question asked whether becoming a socialist would have the same effect as becoming a communist. Six writers answered in the affirmative while John Dos Passos observed that 'joining the Socialist Party would have had the same effect on anybody as drinking a bottle of real beer'. The remaining ten authors dismissed the Socialist Party as a 'tepid compromise'.<sup>29</sup> Communists in general regarded socialists with contempt and considered being a socialist tantamount to being a liberal. Socialism in the eyes of

many radicals had become middle class and respected. Many others had their faith in liberalism crushed by the Sacco Vanzetti case and sought a doctrine which was both more effective and produced positive results. In response to this Edmund Wilson and fifty two artists and intellectuals published an open letter to writers, artists, intellectuals and professional men. Their statement denounced the two major parties as 'hopelessly corrupt', rejected socialists as a do-nothing party and declared their support for the Communist Party.<sup>30</sup>

Both the Modern Quarterly questionnaire and the open letter are evidence of the leftward swing of the American intelligensia in the 1930s. Along with Sinclair, there were a number of other victims of this leftwards movement. One of the most notable was Sinclair's biographer, Floyd Dell.<sup>31</sup> Dell was assaulted by critics who viewed him as a symbol of the past. For many critics, Dell had retired from the class struggle and sold out. Along with Sinclair, he was treading the path of hundreds of other ex radicals in America. The 'new' radicals refused to 'tolerate personal or ideological vagaries of the pioneers who had prepared the way for a sterner faith; new generations rejecting the old.'<sup>32</sup> Although ostracized from the radical and literary mainstream Sinclair carried on his own crusade, preaching the same socialism he had first discovered in his early days at Columbia University.

In the thirties, radical critics generally wrote Sinclair out of the evolving movement. For example, John Chamberlain in Farewell to Reform (1932) saw Sinclair primarily as a pamphleteer of the progressive movement.<sup>33</sup> Chamber-

lain admitted that although Sinclair's socialism sprang from a well-intended heart it was impotent. He saw him as the 'Don Quixote of the American revolutionary movement; not being concerned so much with a rigorous economic analysis of society as he was with a series of moral reactions to extreme forms of exploitation within society'.<sup>34</sup> Chamberlain's appraisal proved to be kinder than most.

Philip Rahv sounded a much harsher note. He considered Sinclair dangerous in the same way as Van Wyck Brooks had in the twenties. He deplored his 'emotional, romantic approach to communism as a paper bridge for anyone who wants to cross over into the camp of revolution'.<sup>35</sup> Rahv echoed Lenin's earlier criticism of Sinclair as an emotional socialist without theoretical grounding. He joined those of the 'sterner faith' in asserting that only by mastering Marxist theory could the loyalty of radicals be assured.

Calverton, who had prepared the Modern Quarterly questionnaire, dismissed Sinclair's writing as being in the petty bourgeois tradition of social and political novels. He could not imagine any place for Sinclair in the 'new' radical movement. Granville Hicks, in The Great Tradition, believed Sinclair was lacking in Marxist ideology and concluded that 'although his aim has been socialist his psychology has remained that of liberal'.<sup>36</sup>

Perhaps the most interesting facet of Hicks' assessment is the reason he puts forward for Sinclair's continued influence after 1906 and its demise in the 1930s. Hicks contended that Sinclair possessed the particular ability to be a dedicated socialist while remaining within the American mainstream. For all of these critics, Sinclair simply ceased

to be relevant. However, despite having once again been isolated it did not hinder his writing and crusading, nor did it stop him from embarking on one of his most famous and, indeed, controversial political campaigns.

The advent of the New Deal and events in Europe between 1932 and 1934 accentuated the divergent trends in the Socialist Party. Union and labour leaders were rapidly falling under the spell of the new President, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Many leaders claimed 'what Roosevelt had done was to temporarily stabilize capitalism with a few concessions to workers'.<sup>37</sup> Although these concessions were only a fraction of what the Socialists had been demanding, they were too concerned with immediate problems to listen. During this period several other groups were also concerned with these immediate problems'. A number of movements sprang up almost overnight. Among the most popular were Technocracy, Townsend and the demagogues and Upton Sinclair's E.P.I.C. (End Poverty in California).

On 5 August 1933 The New York Times printed an article on Upton Sinclair's newly formulated socialist programme to aid the poor in California. In the following weeks a number of articles appeared dealing with this programme. E.P.I.C. captured the imagination of thousands of economically distressed people throughout the state of California. Although Sinclair's campaign was born out of sincere motives, it was almost at once subjected to close scrutiny and surrounded by controversy. On 21 October The New York Times reported that G.V. Holes was suing Sinclair for stealing her idea. The following day the plan was denounced by a leading economist

R. Babson, as being unworkable.

Sinclair had originally envisaged E.P.I.C. as having a quasi-socialist programme. One of the main reforms of the programme was to be a pension of \$50 a month payable to all citizens over the age of 60. This benefit and others which he planned would be partly funded by state income and inheritance taxes and partly from the saving made by putting the unemployed into productive labour for themselves. He preached his gospel of economic relief throughout California to increasingly larger audiences.

The E.P.I.C. programme caught the imagination of a variety of people and many of Sinclair's ideas were adopted by other contemporary reformers. He later claimed one of the most famous reform programmes was 'borrowed' directly from E.P.I.C. In 1938 he wrote:

I talked this pension plan all over the State including Long Beach and a physician of that city made note of the applause. He went off and thought it over. If \$50 got that much applause \$200 ought to get four times as much. The increased spending would put everybody to work and money could be raised by a 3% tax on all transactions which nobody would mind. So came the Townsend Plan and very soon at our E.P.I.C. meetings old folks would rise up and ask what I thought of it. I told them the transaction tax would cancel all the benefits which the pension was expected to confer. The consuming power would be increased a dollar; we would merely be taking money out of our right hand pockets and putting it into our left hand pockets so Dr Townsend's old folks said I was a communist and an atheist and did not vote for me. 38

The popularity of E.P.I.C. encouraged Sinclair to think again of standing for public office. On 1 April 1934 The New York Times reported that Sinclair would be seeking the Democratic nomination for Governor of California. On several occasions since 1906 he had stood for various State



and Federal offices. However, it had always been on a purely socialist platform and as a Socialist Party candidate. In order to be nominated as a Democratic candidate he had to resign from the Socialist Party. So for the second time in twenty years Upton Sinclair tendered his resignation.

The New York Times speculated that Sinclair would be a strong contender in Southern California and in particular around his home town Pasadena. By August Sinclair and J. Creel had emerged as the leading Democratic contenders. Throughout August Sinclair campaigned extensively on the 'end poverty' platform and by 30 August primary results showed that he was marginally ahead. The Republican Party's nominee for Governor was the incumbent, Governor F.F. Merriam, who was unpopular in certain quarters and his record was far from impressive.

Sinclair eventually won the nomination by comprehensively defeating Creel in the Primaries. His candidacy received the endorsement of the Californian Federation of Labour who publicly opposed Merriam. Sinclair's success, however, prompted many critics to attack both the Democratic Party and their candidate. A.M. Hyde and Senator Fess were quoted in The New York Times as viewing his nomination as a support of the socialist tendencies of the New Deal and predicted that Sinclair would be soundly defeated. Although he had been selected as the Democratic nominee, his selection was not well received by all party members. Leading Democrats D.F. Supple and H.E. Monroe joined with other members of the party in denouncing Sinclair's nomination.

Several other public figures, including Judge M.I.

Sullivan, declared their support for Merrian, while W.K. Hearst was a voice in the wilderness when he remarked 'that Sinclair was a theorist who had a fair chance of being elected'.

Unfortunately for Sinclair, his advocacy of socialist causes in the past showed a tendency to resurface. On 16 September, for example, the Economic Council of Southern California claimed that he was a menace and declared its intention to work for the re-election of Merrian. The Council's statement echoed the claims of the American Legion of ten years before. Sinclair's early electoral successes caused some interesting reactions. The very idea that Upton Sinclair could conceivably become Governor of California caused some moments of genuine panic among the State's corporate interests. With equal horror, the prospect of an E.P.I.C. victory convinced these interests that radical socialism was just around the corner.

One of the most frightened groups was the movie industry, which had grown prosperous since shifting their studios from New York to California. This prosperity was due in the main to state government incentives and in particular to the minimal taxation which it was required to pay. The E.P.I.C. plan would have severely cut its revenue. The movie industry therefore launched a campaign to discredit Sinclair. His earlier works were analysed and his more radical statements taken out of context, reprinted and circulated in newspapers and magazines. Film magnates produced faked newsreel interviews with 'heavies' cast as 'bums en route to California'.<sup>39</sup> They played strongly on the fear amongst native Californian

workers that huge numbers of jobless would flood into California, drawn by the promises of E.P.I.C.

The campaign against Sinclair was also backed by other major industrialists. A systematic campaign aiming to discredit him and prevent his election was undoubtedly in operation. Al Richmond writing in 1973 contended:

Not even in the days when the Southern Pacific Railway was called the octopus did corporate wealth intervene so flagrantly in California's electoral process. Big employers tried to sow hysteria among their workers with predictions of an economic doomsday if Sinclair won and since these seers owned the State's major enterprises they communicated the threat of a self-fulfilling prophecy. They also made a direct threat: discharge of any employee who voted for Sinclair ... movie magnates extorted from their employees contributions for the incumbent Republican Governor Frank Merrian. 40

The 1934 Californian elections for Governor rate as one of the most corrupt and controversial elections ever contested. More than \$10,000,000, a fabulous sum in those days, was spent by big industry to beat Sinclair, much of it used to shower the electorate with visions of anarchy, chaos and revolution.

On 29 October The New York Times reported that Sinclair had demanded a congressional investigation into the false movie propaganda. The investigating committee never eventuated though it is almost certain that a movie industry conspiracy had taken place. Politically he received another setback when influential 'New Dealers', Ickes and Harry Hopkins, were reported as not planning to speak in support of him. A Literary Digest poll published on 25 October put Merrian ahead of Sinclair, although alleged that the results were a fraud and that Merrian's backers were falsely repre-

senting his support. Subsequent polls on 26, 27 and 31 October all showed Merrian to be leading the election race.

The newspapers of the time were full of speculation about Sinclair, E.P.I.C. and their chances of success. The St Louis Dispatch is a good example. The newspaper published a letter alleged to have been written by J.A. Farley to E. Trotsky, President of the Associated Democratic Clubs of Whittier, urging the election of Sinclair. Sinclair's aids quickly had the letter photostated and widely circulated. Farley refused to comment on the letter when asked what had been his intention in writing to Trotsky. The letter was later described by The New York Times as a mistake as the signature was affixed, to a form letter, with a rubber stamp and had been sent out by an unnamed subordinate. The 'Farley affair' proved to be another setback to Sinclair's campaign. In the same week he received another rebuff when he was repudiated by Creel, his competitor for the democratic nomination. Creel charged that Sinclair had promised to modify the E.P.I.C. programme. Although Creel had no intentions of backing Merrian the publication of his letter greatly lessened Sinclair's chances.

As election day came closer, the campaign against Sinclair intensified. Politically the opposition to Sinclair came from a coalition of democratic and progressive republican leaders who tried to frighten white collar workers. They argued that his victory would greatly affect their job security and that he was a dangerous radical. On 30 October a poll published in The New York Times gave odds of five to one on a Merrian victory.

A sizeable and influential opposition was assembled against Sinclair. It increased on 21 October when M. Dempster, the socialist candidate, urged Sinclair to withdraw and to support the Socialist Party. But Sinclair, the 'eternal socialist', had burnt too many bridges and gone too far to withdraw now. He continued to campaign although a forecast on 4 November predicted defeat by a wide margin.

On 7 November F.F. Merrian was duly re-elected Governor of California. Nevertheless Sinclair had greatly shaken the old order and had come very close to causing a major upset. Sinclair was to write in 1964:

'A big advertising concern had been hired to defeat E.P.I.C. They made a careful study of everything I had written and they took passages out of context and even cut sentences off in the middle to make them mean the opposite of what I had written'.<sup>41</sup>

Throughout the election campaign and the lifespan of E.P.I.C. he had been subjected to an extensive propaganda campaign from a number of quarters. He had also to answer trumped-up charges by opponents and his own charges of fraud and ballot stuffing were rejected by illegal authorities. Despite all these setbacks, and the fact that Sinclair had begun with little more than an idea and a flair for propaganda, his total of 879,000 votes told much about the popular frame of mind.

Although defeated in the election Sinclair continued to campaign for E.P.I.C. programme. Under the managership of Richard S. Otto and with the anticipation of a Sinclair victory, E.P.I.C. had spread like wildfire. After the election, however, the momentum began to slow. Communists increasingly disrupted meetings, calling E.P.I.C. 'one more

rotten egg from the blue buzzard's nest'. Circulation of the eight page weekly paper, The Epic News, began to fall and internal dissension among prominent leaders weakened the programme. Sinclair continued to plan for a nationwide expansion of the campaign, but by 17 March 1935 The New York Times reported that he had been eclipsed as leader of E.P.I.C. by State Senator Olsen and that the movement appeared to lack support.

Although Sinclair continued to advocate E.P.I.C. policies after 1935 the programme effectively faded out. It had always been highly popular amongst the unemployed and poor but had engendered suspicion and genuine fear amongst the capitalist interests. Another problem the programme encountered was the contradictory statements of support made by many prominent people. Sinclair recalled one such example in his autobiography. The incident occurred during a visit with Father Coughlin (the radio priest). Coughlin initially endorsed E.P.I.C. but later denied his endorsement and publicly condemned many of the things he had formerly approved. This proved to be as damaging as 'The Farley Letter Affair' had been during the election.

The last 'act' in the E.P.I.C. saga was a dramatic 'skit' called Depression Island written by Sinclair. It was intended to be performed by E.P.I.C. supporters in Hollywood, and Charlie Chaplin had agreed to speak on behalf of the campaign. When the skit was finally presented, however, it merely demonstrated Sinclair's severe limitations as a dramatist; and it remains one of his score of dramatic failures.

In the following months, Sinclair was content to blame

the death of E.P.I.C. on a wide range of enemies. Sinclair seemed determined to find any scapegoat to explain away his own failings. In this case, it was the familiar theme of the capitalist-inspired conspiracy. What he failed to realise was that while E.P.I.C's aims were admirable, he had not presented any concrete means of implementing his reforms. Sinclair had been quick to condemn the 'Townsend Plan' and the programme proposed by Senator Huey Long of Louisiana yet he refused to accept that they sought the same basic ends. The 'New Deal' for all its faults took concrete steps and had Federal backing. When Sinclair claimed that his plan was destroyed by capitalists and big business, he overlooked the fact that E.P.I.C. had run its course and died a natural death.

In 1938 Sinclair wrote his last substantial work of the 1930s. The Fliver King is a historical fiction, but fiction that is in reality a virtual biography of the life of Henry Ford from his beginnings in a small shed on Bagley Street to becoming the largest independent manufacturer in America.

Sinclair's study of Ford rehashes many ideas and criticisms which had first emerged in previous works. It is perhaps closest to King Coal (1917) in style and is very reminiscent of his early muckraking novels. By the end of the thirties Sinclair's alienation from the literary and political mainstream seemed complete. He was now in his late sixties and although he formed a link between early twentieth century radicalism and the newer developments of the thirties he appeared to be both impotent and redundant as a writer.

However in the early forties Upton Sinclair underwent a brief personal renaissance. During this period he completed the monumental 'World's End series' of novels which effectively thrust him back into the public eye and regained for him a good measure of popularity.

The enigma of Sinclair continued to grow. He was the only real writer of his generation and stature still publishing. The literary recognition that had long eluded him finally came during this period. One of the eleven 'World's End' novels, Dragons Teeth (1942) was awarded the Pulitzer Prize. The novels proved to be financially successful, selling well in the United States and throughout the world.

Although by now well into his seventies the prolific nature which had always characterized his career showed little sign of waning. Throughout the fifties decade and into the sixties he continued to write and publish articles and novels. Perhaps the most notable example was the Cup of Fury (1957), a reworking of 1927 prohibitionist tract The Wet Parade. In 1962 at the age of eighty four he published the second part of his autobiography which had first appeared as Candid Reminiscences in 1932. Two years later Sinclair's fifty year marriage to Mary Craig Kimborough came to an end with her death. A few months later Sinclair remarried and this marriage, his third, lasted until his own death in 1968.

With his death the last link with early twentieth century radicalism and indeed literature was broken. Upton Sinclair, writer, socialist, politician, prohibitionist,



radical, humanitarian and American, had outlived all his contemporaries, enemies and critics. Only now, after more than a decade since his death have historians begun to take renewed interest in his work. His novels and personal papers are a priceless tool for deciphering the history of the United States in the last eighty years. His career is possibly best summed up by The New York Times obituary of 1968:

There were many reasons why Upton Sinclair for all the stir and excitement he evoked did not quite attain the literary recognition in the United States which was his due. First he was a radical, a socialist of the thorough-going kind in a society still blown by the winds of rugged individualism.<sup>43</sup>

The obituary, while accurately pinpointing Sinclair's lack of literary recognition, perhaps misinterprets the reasons. There is little doubt that he was a radical and socialist of the thorough-going type. But he was equally rejected by the socialist and radical forces as he was by the more conservative literary historians and critics. Despite the changing and improving attitude towards his work the socialist historians in general have continued to ignore his contributions. Many histories of the Socialist Movement in the United States tend to make only perfunctory references to the existence of both Sinclair and his work. Sinclair remains a curious and contradictory figure in American history. He stands alone, being attacked and ridiculed by both conservative and radical elements. Yet, despite his uncertain position, there is no doubt that he stands as a major figure in the evolving picture of American history. He acted as a catalyst for reform and an agitator for change. He remains perhaps the most widely translated American author yet is without honour in his own country. He is indeed a 'prophet without honour'.

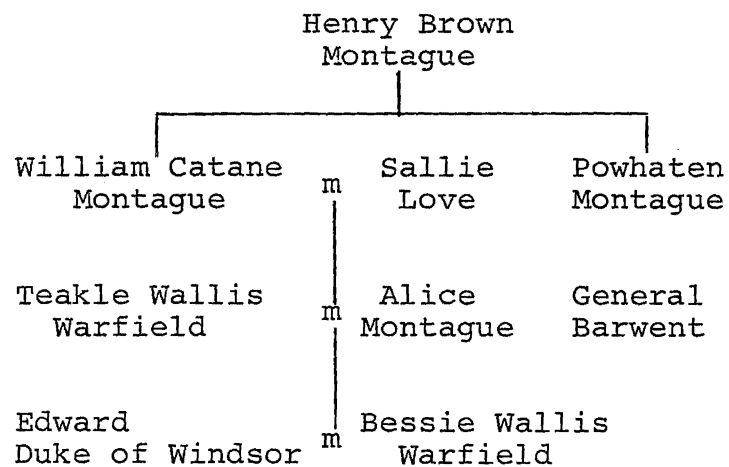
'I, GOVERNOR OF CALIFORNIA  
AND HOW I ENDED POVERTY'.

- 1 L.A. Fretz, 'Upton Sinclair and the Jazz Age', ANZASA Bulletin, Vol. 1, No. 6, May 1974, p.18.
- 2 IBID, p.18.
- 3 IBID, p.19.
- 4 IBID, p.24.
- 5 IBID, p.25.
- 6 IBID, p.26.
- 7 Charles A. Madison, Crusaders and critics (New York), p.495.
- 8 Sinclair to Issac Russell, 18 June 1926, Sinclair Papers - quoted in Fretz, p.27.
- 9 IBID, p.28.
- 10 IBID, p.28.
- 11 IBID, p.28.
- 12 New York Times, 21 April, p.13:4.
- 13 New York Times, 17 May, 1923, p.20:3.
- 14 The Masses was a radical magazine of arts, letters and politics. It was run and directed by the artists themselves and Sinclair had contributed many articles to it during his career. It was later renamed New Masses and advocated a more unified radical stance.
- 15 Aaron, Writers on the Left, p.23.
- 16 IBID, p.225,
- 17 IBID, p.227.
- 18 Willis Wager, American Literature - A World View (New York University Press, 1968), p.226.
- 19 Aaron, p.225.
- 20 IBID , P.225
- 21 IBID, p.171.
- 22 IBID, p.171.
- 23 IBID, p.171.
- 24 IBID, p.171

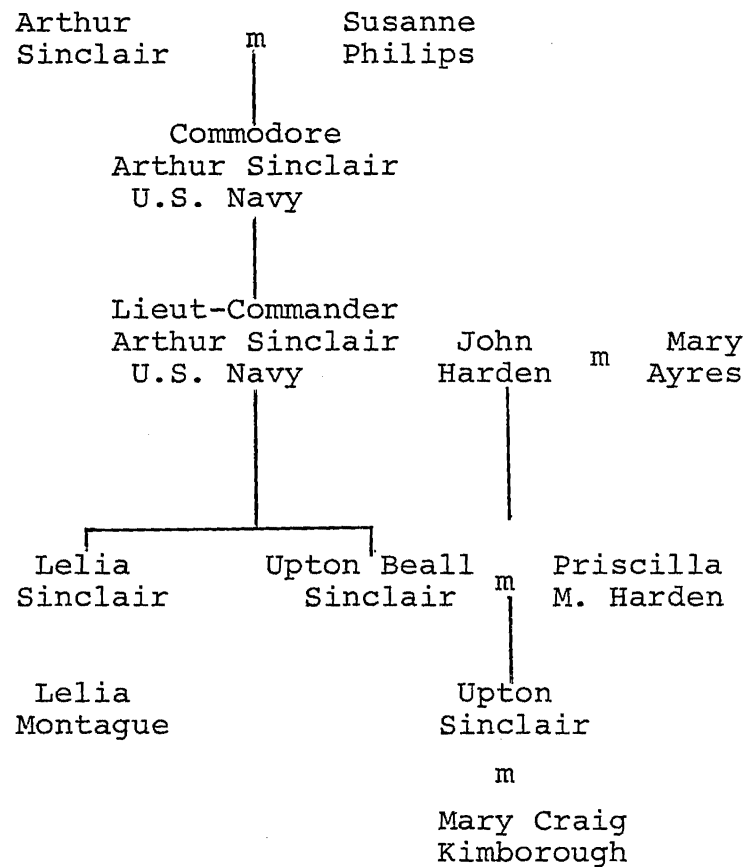
- 25 Edmund Wilson was one critic and writer who held this view.
- 26 Aaron, p.173.
- 27 IBID ,182
- 28 IBID , 182
- 29 IBID, p.191.
- 30 IBID, p.191.
- 31 Mike Gold was particularly severe on Dell. He viewed him as a traitor to the cause.
- 32 Quoted in Scriabine p.220
- 33 Quoted in Christine Scriabine, p.223.
- 34 IBID, p.223.
- 35 IBID, p.224.
- 36 IBID, p.224.
- 37 Donald Drew (Ed.), Socialism and American Life (Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1952), p.372.
- 38 Sinclair, Letters to a Millionaire, p.29.
- 39 Al Richmond, A Long View from the Left - Memoirs of an American Revolutionary (Boston, Houghton, 1973), p.268.
- 40 IBID, p.268.
- 41 Sinclair, Autobiography, p.286.
- 42 The 'blue buzzard' was the communists' name for the new deal's blue eagle, the symbol of NRA.
- 43 Obituaries from The Times 1961-70 (Newspaper Archive Developments Ltd., 1972), p.731.

THE FAMILY TREE OF UPTON SINCLAIR

THE NORFOLK SINCLAIRS



THE BALTIMORE HARDENS



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3. Prince Hagen, 1903.
4. Manassas: A novel of the War, 1904 (reissued as Theirs be the Guilt).
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6. The Jungle, 1906.
7. The Industrial Republic, 1907.
8. The Overman, 1907.
9. The Metropolis, 1908.
10. The Moneychangers, 1908.
11. Samuel the Seeker, 1910.
12. The Fasting Cure, 1911.
13. Loves Pilgrimage, 1911.
14. Plays of Protest, 1912.
15. The Millennium: A comedy of the Year 2000, 1912.
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17. Damaged Goods, 1913.
18. Sylvia's Marriage, 1914.
19. The Cry for Justice, 1915.
20. King Coal, 1917.
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30. Singing Jailbirds: A drama in four acts, 1924.
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39. Mountain City, 1930.
40. Mental Radio, 1930, 1962.
41. Roman Holiday, 1931.
42. American Outpost, 1932.
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1933.
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48. Depression Island, 1935.
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50. Co-op, 1936.
51. The Gnomobile, 1936, 1962.
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53. Fliver King, 1937.
54. No Pasaran, 1937.
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56. Our Lady, 1938.
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